

1999

Kunapipi 21 (1) 1999 Full Version

Shirley Chew

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

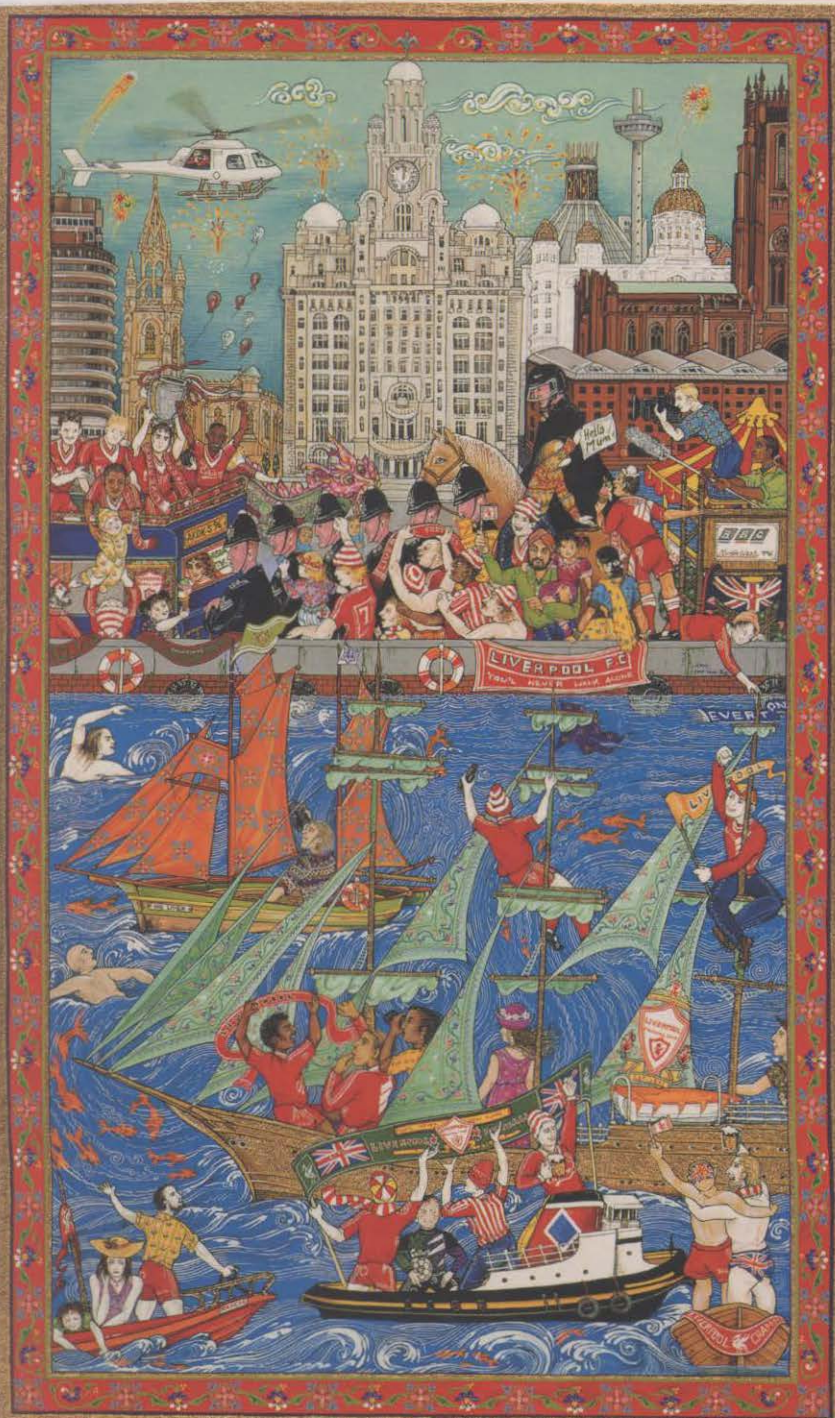
Recommended Citation

Chew, Shirley, Kunapipi 21 (1) 1999 Full Version, *Kunapipi*, 21(1), 1999.
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol21/iss1/1>

Kunapipi 21 (1) 1999 Full Version

Abstract

Kunapipi 21 (1) 1999 Full Version.



KUNAPIPI

Journal of Post-Colonial Writing

325B/7A

VOLUME XXI NUMBER 1
1999

Funded by
**THE
ARTS
COUNCIL
OF ENGLAND**

Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse any political views expressed by its contributors. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet. Wherever possible the submission should be on disc (soft-ware preferably Word for Windows, Wordperfect or Macwrite saved for PC on PC formatted disc) and should be accompanied by a hard copy, please include a short biography, address and email contact if available.

Kunapipi is an internationally refereed journal of post-colonial literature formally acknowledged by the Australian National Library. Work published in *Kunapipi* is cited in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature's Annual Bibliography* (UK), *The Year's Work in English Studies* (UK), *The American Journal of African Literature* (USA), *The Grahamstown Information Journal* (SA), *Australian Literary Studies*, *The Indian Association for Commonwealth Studies* (India), *The New Straits Times* (Indonesia) & *The Australian Public Affairs Information Service* (produced by the National Library of Australia).

All correspondence – manuscripts, books for review, enquiries – should be sent to:

Kunapipi

P.O. Box 20, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, HX7 5UZ, UK
email: 106071.365@compuserve.com

SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR 1999:

Individuals: 1 year: £20

Institutions: 1 year: £45

Please note that if payment is made in currencies other than £ sterling, £5 must be added to cover banking costs. Cheques made payable to *Kunapipi*.

Please address all subscription enquiries to:

Kunapipi

P.O. Box 20, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, HX7 5UZ, UK
email: 106071.365@compuserve.com

Copyright © 1999 Dangaroo Press

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act no part may be reproduced without written permission. Enquiries should be made to the editor.

ISBN 1 871049 63 6

ISSN 0106-5734



Kunapipi

VOLUME XXI NUMBER 1, 1999

Editor-in-Chief

ANNA RUTHERFORD

Guest editor

SHIRLEY CHEW

Editorial Advisors

DIANA BRYDON, KEE THUAN CHYE, ANNE COLLETT, MARGARET DAYMOND, ERNEST K. EMENYONU, HELEN GILBERT, GARETH GRIFFITHS, ALAMGIR HASHMI, ARITHA VAN HERK, ALAN LAWSON, RUSSELL McDOUGALL, HENA MAES-JELINEK, GANESH MISHRA, ALASTAIR NIVEN, KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN, BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS, PAUL SHARRAD, KIRPAL SINGH, HELEN TIFFIN, GERRY TURCOTTE, JAMES WIELAND, RAJIVA WIJESINHA, MARK WILLIAMS, R. ZHUWARARA.

Marketing

SUSAN BURNS

Production

GLENDIA PATTENDEN

Acknowledgements

Kunapipi is published with assistance from the European branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, the Faculty of Arts and the Centre for Research in Textual and Cultural Studies (CRITACS) at the University of Wollongong, and the Arts Council of England.



We wish to thank all contributors to this journal and also to acknowledge the writers' permission to reprint extracts from the following:

George Elliott Clarke, for 'Au Tombeau de Bishop', previously published in *Con Spirito II*, ed. Sandra Barry, a limited publication circulated at a conference at Arcadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, September 1998. Ian Duhig, for 'The Cat and Banjo', 'Fundamentals', from *The Bradford Count* (Bloodaxe, 1991); 'Armouries', 'Merchants of Silence' and 'Talking God' from *Nominees* (Bloodaxe, 1998). Jackie Kay, for 'Lucozade', 'Pride', 'The Shoes of Dead Comrades', from *Off Colour* (Bloodaxe, 1998)

Front cover: 'Painting the Town Red', Amrit K.D. Kaur Singh, 1996 (17 x 29.3 cm)

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal Myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.

Contents

FICTION

<i>Lindsey Collen, 'Honey's Mother's Confession'</i>	3
<i>Fazlul Huq, 'Haran's Death'</i>	12
TRANS. OSMAN JAMAL	
<i>Elizabeth Cook, 'Words for Blue'</i>	42
<i>Daemienne Sheehan, 'My First Englishman'</i>	84
<i>Shirley Geok-lin Lim, 'American Higher Education'</i>	94

POETRY

<i>John Whale, 'The Goree', 'Sugar'</i>	1
<i>George Elliott Clarke, 'Exile', 'Negation', 'Au Tombeau de Bishop', 'Ecclesiastes 12'</i>	22
<i>Jackie Kay, 'Lucozade', 'The Shoes of Dead Comrades', 'Pride'</i>	25
<i>Claire Harris, 'Ka'ci Woman of the Arawak and Karinabu/Carib, Her Sound/ing'</i>	46
<i>Susan Bassnett & Alejandra Pizarnik, 'From Exchanging Lives'</i>	
<i>'God's Chandelier', 'Signos', 'Signs'</i>	
<i>'Goethe's Desk', 'Fiesta', 'Fiesta'</i>	
<i>'Sargasso Sea', 'Nombrarte', 'Speaking Your Name'</i>	
<i>'Straw on my Desk', 'Tu Voz', 'Your Voice'</i>	51
<i>Ian Duhig, 'The Cat and Banjo', 'Fundamentals', 'Armouries', 'Merchants of Silence' Talking God'</i>	71
<i>Landeg White, 'Poetry of Verandas', 'Bacalhau', 'Let me tell you, Jack'</i>	75

ARTICLES

<i>Roshni Mooneeram, 'Prospero's Island Revisited: Dev Virahsawmy's Toufann'</i>	17
<i>Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, Jnr, 'The Nation as Imagined Community: Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease'</i>	30
<i>Gabrielle Watling, 'Hybridity as Agency for the Postcolonial Migrant: Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine and Sara Suleri's Meatless Days'</i>	60

INTERVIEW

<i>Sujata Bhatt in interview with Cecile Sandten</i>	110
<i>Amrit and Rabindra Kaur Singh, 'Cover Artists: Twin Studio'</i>	119

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

121

EDITORIAL

Part of the pleasure in editing this issue for *Kunapipi* was trawling for copy both within and outside Britain, and finding everywhere among the writers I approached a warm and generous response. The resulting rich yield includes, along with material from two recently published volumes of poetry, a good range of new work and 'work in progress', and along with writers already known to readers of *Kunapipi*, several newcomers to the journal – all in all, signs of the diversity and significance of the literatures from Commonwealth countries in the latter half of this century.

Serendipity played its agreeable part, too, in these last six months or so, springing a clutch of shared themes in the contents of what was to have been a 'general' issue with the hint that label sometimes carries of a mixed bag of stuff. Especially prominent, whether in the verse or prose fiction or critical essays, are themes relating to the ways in which language – with its definition, elusiveness, hybridity, local energies, transcultural agency – makes and remakes our world; ideas which are explored and articulated through a lively variety of forms and techniques and englishes. De Quincey's 'many-languaged town' finds a contemporary version in the visual realization of Liverpool by two British Sikh artists. The interconnections in the experiences and work of Bassnett and Pizarnik, traceried first in the Preface to *Exchanging Lives*, are then mirrored in the structural arrangement of the individual poems and translations which follow. That 'newest mystery', which is a marvellous sense of belonging in Landeg White's poetry, rests as much upon the richly tangled words and figures he inhabits as upon the delights of living in Portugal. Finally, a dazzling image of a language the creative energies and resources of which are bound up with its cultural hybridity and rootedness in Mauritian society is conjured up for us in Mooneeram's discussion of Dev Virahswamy's adaptations of Shakespeare into Mauritian Creole.

Needless to say, it was a pleasure working again with Susan Burns and Glenda Pattenden, who contributed in inspired and practical ways at every level of the production of the issue, and to whom I am indebted for ideas on literary material, the cover design, and editorial matters.

Shirley Chew

John Whale

THE GOREE

When the Goree went up in 1802
the rum-soaked flakes sent cattle
reeling through the floodlit crops.
You could see angels flaming in the sky
all the way to Warrington.

*Over the many-languaged town
of Liverpool all heaven was ablaze.*

You'd have to go a long way south
through blistering siroccos
and choking sahel dust
to find a night as close as this.
It must be more than cotton.

It must be more than cotton.

SUGAR

The crisp edge of the white cube
gave way slowly against his palate
and the sweet melt spilling over
teeth on either side of his tongue
like a coolness or spreading heat
(it was always impossible to tell)
suddenly didn't happen at all.
There was instead a thickness,
a gelatinous resistance pulling
the tip of his tongue towards it,
and where the sweetness should be,
not exactly a bitterness as such,
not like the yellow staining glob
of serum which made him salivate
and wince in the crowded clinic
way back in sixties Liverpool –
no, there was a thickness in this
which tasted salty first then sweet,
like the cuts he'd licked in boyhood,
from his own elbows and knees,
and now the sugar came home to him
with all the dark taint of molasses,
the smell drifting from Tate & Lyle,
and the remembered difficulty he'd had
understanding their tins of *Golden Syrup* –
the small cloud of flies gathering
over the body of a dead lion
and the wisdom of the quoted words:
OUT OF THE STRONG
CAME FORTH SWEETNESS.
But all he could think of was the juices
draining inside the rotting carcass,
laid out under an African sun,
and that sickly smell carried on the wind
which seemed to him much more than sugar
and, somehow, very close to home.

LINDSEY COLLEN

Honey's Mother's Confession

You are lying in your bedroom knitting, you say, that night, the night you did it, or you think you did it.

You are knitting, knitting away and thinking. *Musing*, as you put it, just before putting your head down and falling asleep. You are thinking about this and that, putting the day in order in your head.

Everything is very quiet. Honey is in her room. She's probably already asleep. Her boy is probably asleep from before her even.

You smile as you think of him. Same calm ways as his mother, as your Honey.

Honey says she is *dead beat* today. The factory work tires her out, mentally and physically, she says. She operates a big cutting machine that cuts two hundred backs and two hundred fronts of shirts all at once, she says. So that the pattern in the material for the backs joins up exactly to the pattern in the material for the fronts, where they will get sewn together under the arms. So she tells you.

She only gets back after dark. Then the evening meal. There was, you say, nothing unusual in that. You convinced her to share *your* food and not to bother lighting her Primus and not to bother cooking for herself and the boy. Not to tire herself out, you say. Rice. And pumpkin leaf soup with the rice water and browned onions. And salt fish. Boiled first to desalinate it a bit, and then broken into tiny bits, and deep-fried until they were crisp. The boy loves that. Some chutney with raw, sour little tomatoes and chillies and pickled lemon and garlic. You say this as though you can remember the exact tastes, as if they have all stayed in your mouth from that night onwards. As though these tastes were a sign. Or as though they remain as a proof.

This is all happening one evening some time back. Maybe this time last year, in terms of the weather, you say. It is hot and stuffy then too. *Airless* is the way you put it. That night is airless. Same as in this cell tonight you say. The custard apple tree in front of your house has got new leaves on it, you add for proof. So many you remember you can't see through it when you look out of her window. As though the green of the forest is inside her room. And they are dead still, the leaves, that night.

Her boy is probably also asleep. Yes, you repeat this. Need to convince yourself that he knows nothing. No doubt already fast asleep in a cot-like thing he sleeps in at the foot of her bed. He is very bright, you say. An

affectionate, warm child. Like her, you repeat, calm. Their room is very neat. She keeps it that way. The clothes are all in a cupboard in little piles. Shirts. Underclothes. Trousers. Her skirts. Dresses. And their socks.

There is a calendar on the wall with a photograph of a grotto of some kind. A religious grotto, you say. With a candle in it. Perhaps in the Alps. Or the Pennines. You sometimes pray to this calendar or to the grotto or to the candle. When you are all alone. Pray that she and the little one will be safe. That it will look after them, the calendar.

Roderick is out at work, you tell me. Yes, her husband is called Roderick. He works night shift at the electronics factory. He prepares his own food if she's not back from the factory yet, and today their paths crossed, as you put it. She got home just before he left. Their paths crossed that night. This is not unusual. No, they don't fight. Never heard a rough word between them. They both take a drink, you say. That's all. Drink a bit. And they laugh. They are too carefree in their ways. For you, you say. Too carefree. Happy-go-lucky, you add. You say this. You also say that you are not like this, that you left your happiness behind, long ago somewhere. Maybe you buried it. In the place your navel string was buried in. *On another island*, you say. You left your carefreeness on another island.

Was it when they closed the Islands maybe, I think. But I don't know.

I don't understand what this means. I heard you saying it to Blue One, *the Islands are closed*. A man said it to you. Through a hatch, did he say it? These words mean nothing to me. Maybe you will tell me another day. Explain what it all means. We will have plenty of time in here. Perhaps too much time.

But I only say: 'What electronics does he make, your son-in-law?' Of course, I have to ask this, although I try my best not to. I just can't help it. I am too curious about the subject.

'Tiny little plates, he says. Soldering minute things he looks at through a magnifying eye-piece strapped to his head, soldering them to one another. Like a jeweller, he says. Only not jewels. Each thing has a precise other thing it has to be soldered to. He doesn't know what they make with the plates. He says he doesn't want to know either. They sacked a group of his friends who tried to find out. He said he told them not to be nosy. He warned them. He told me he had. Not our business, he said to them. We just work here, he said. He thinks maybe it's for tanks or satellites or automatic things for submarines. Weapons, arms, automatic ones. But maybe he is only a boy imagining things. Why do you ask?'

'Just wondered. I'm interested in electrics, you see, and electronics. I also do that kind of work.'

Everything is quiet, you say. You knit a last few stitches, two plain two pearl, you say, for the ankle bit, two plain two pearl, before switching the light off. Socks. You knit socks. Socks for everyone. One by one. The hotter the weather, the more socks you knit. You started knitting when

they closed the Islands and you never stopped, you say. This is an aside, you say. If you had needles, you would be knitting right now, while talking, you say. *They'll never give you needles in here*, I say. But then again, maybe I am wrong. Maybe they will now. They have changed their attitude towards such things, Tiko told me. I look, for example, at your scarf. I think of the one in our cell before us. Mopey Sue? How did she do it? Cutting or hanging, I wonder. Then I go back to listening to you again.

You hear Honey cough. Or is it a snort? Or is it just her snoring? In her sleep, you think. So you ignore the sound. Wait. Listening. Knit-knitting, knit-knitting hesitantly now. Not with the same rhythm. Having to check plain and pearl again and again. Losing concentration. But no concern in you, yet. A cough or snort or snore is the kind of thing that happens often. But still, you are alerted somewhere deep inside you. Two plain two pearl. Two plain two pearl. But watchful. Suspicious.

Then there is another sound. This time it is a loud snort. So you put your knitting down quickly and quietly, but with enough time to make sure the needles are stuck into the ball of wool carefully, and you put on your slippers and patter through the lounge to her room. You stop just outside her door, and listen with your ear almost touching her door, right to the wood of that flush-door, you say, 'Honey! You OK Honey? Sweetie?' No answer. She's asleep, and so is her little one. Because he doesn't answer either. He is big enough to answer. If he was awake, he would answer. So, you don't open the door. You turn around, leave her. Privacy demands this, you say. You turn your back on her door, and you walk slowly back to your own room. But you leave your door open now though. In case.

You take your slippers off, but leave them just where you can put your feet back into them if necessary. You go back to bed. You just sit there, leaning against the wall, your knitting on your knees. You wish you didn't knit and knit, not in this heat. But you don't even start knitting again.

You hear that sound again. You jump now. Nerves, you think. Only my nerves. But your heart is beating too fast. Maybe it's just palpitations, you say. Because of the anaemia you've got. You put your knitting aside for good now. You sit bolt upright and you wait. You listen. You wait. On edge. Your pulse thumping away at your temple. A feeling of concern is rising in you. But then again, she cooks separately. Most days anyway, and this means you have to respect a certain distance that goes with separate cooking. I don't want to interfere, you think. You hesitate. At the same time, you do your best to calm yourself down. You make yourself breathe really slowly, especially breathing out really long and hard, like the doctor said to do when you got that anxiety spell in the night for nothing once, and like your great-grandmother told you to do, when you got scared as a child on the island where there were so many ghosts they outnumbered the people. Stay still, she said to herself. Ever so still. And

breathe right out, long and slow. For god's sake, you mumble to yourself, keep calm.

Then you hear a sound so loud and so terrible, a sound so unearthly, so appalling, coming from a human being's chest cavity, that you shoot out of bed, tear out of your room, through the lounge, run barefoot up to her room, shove her door open, and find her.

You stand there.

One look, and already you know.

She is already dead, you say.

Dead.

'How do you know?' I ask.

Your sweetest one. Your closest one. Your last youngest smallest one. Your Honey. Your only one. Only one left. You touch her forehead. Is she still warm? You can't remember any more. Her nostrils and mouth are already sealed with a fine foam. Like the foam on a wave on the reef, you say. Foam you couldn't possibly breathe through. No living person, you say, could breathe through that fine foam.

Now this is when your story goes threadbare.

And it closes up on me.

And it shuts me out.

And you start to act shiftily. But I know. I know.

The child is still asleep, you say. Are you sure? Do you wake him up?

You feel tension in the air.

Dead.

Death has come into your house. Into her room. What does it mean? What are its consequences?

Her death frightens you. Frightens you so bad you don't know anything anymore. Your throat is closing in on you.

Do you just lose your mind? Do you have a bad turn?

You panic.

You feel rigid. As though you were the one who is dead. You say this. In another world, you say. As though death had come to take you. If only, you say. But, you say that you feel lucid at the same time. Clear-headed as you put it. The opposite of losing your mind, you say. Direct, right there, in the middle of your mind's eye, you see your great-grandmother, your maternal granny's mother. You look at her. Then you move into her, you say. Does this make sense? Do you revert to being her? Or do you do what you somehow learnt from your great-grandmother to do? Under such extreme circumstances.

She knew about the danger of knowledge and of the inexplicable. The danger of understanding and the deadly peril of any new mystery. She knew the risk for the witness. She knew about the dangers for the first on the scene. She taught you about all this. The danger of the answer and worse still, the danger of questions. The ill-fatedness of the unexplainable. She trained you. *Hide the unknown.* And hide from it. Hide from the

knowledge of it, itself. Cover what you do not understand. Immediately and irredeemably. Cover it up. Like a cat does after defecating. Look left and right, sneakily, and cover it. Never try to know the unknowable. Step around it. Avoid it. Never let a policeman in either, if you can help it, she had told you. Never. At times like this, never tell things. Silence. Pull the sheet over her. Pall. Rather no-one know. Not even you. But you don't actually pull the sheet. You just stand there. Studying the foam for any sign of movement.

None.

You shake like a leaf. Then make a low lulling sound. Ululations. You go blank. Under orders. Like a zombie. A female zombie. *Beware! Be shift!* Your eyes skim around in horror. The strange singing in you comes from another world. *Beware! Sulk!* What will be the effect of any action? The song of the past gets sung slow, swing low, sweet chariot, sing slow. *Be sullen! Show nothing! Do nothing!* Just in case of catastrophe. Catastrophic effects may ensue. Quiet. Beware. Beware. Beware. Careful, tread carefully. Give nothing away in your words. Put the fingers of both hands together lightly in front of your face. Tilt your head forwards slightly. Look at your own hands. Hide all knowledge. Raise your hands, and hide behind them. Know nothing. Except one thing. You know, and you know with a deep and absolute certainty, that *anything* you do, *anything*, could provoke the end of everything everyone ever knew around you. You and everyone else could get snatched up, stolen, spirited away for ever, from everything you ever knew. Never to return.

Cataclysms.

Holocausts.

Mass deportations in irons.

Rough seas.

Be *silly*. Pretend not to understand. Go catatonic. Be a beast of burden. Embrace stupidity. It's safe. Safer. Assume silence. Silent as a tomb. A sepulchre. Confuse the others. Confuse yourself. You are rock.

Rock forwards, rock backwards.

Rock.

You are stone.

So you crouch there now. You sob dry sobs. No-one will ever know anything.

You stay still like that, you say. You don't even go and call Aunt Paquette. She might advise. You wait. Checking. You stand up and look now. Petrified. You stare. No movement of the foam. No stirring or bubbling. You look at her child. Her child still asleep. Your child dead.

You don't know how long. Too long. No use asking you about new minutes and old minutes. What's the point?

So why do you come forward and make this confession now? You didn't do anything. And they lock you up with me, an allegation, and with this young case here of effusion of blood of a police officer.

You say maybe you did kill her.

Maybe, you say.

But you didn't.

I know you didn't. You know you didn't.

Just because you don't know what happened to her. Just because you don't know why you acted like you did doesn't mean you killed her.

So, at the time she died, you thought maybe you killed her? Or now you think so? Or when you confessed? Yesterday?

You say you don't know. Maybe just yesterday.

So you go and call Aunt Paquerette. She runs over to your place, and she rushes up to Honey. And touches her. And she says, but Honey's Mother, she's already cold. In all this heat, she's already cold.

And then Aunt Paquerette catches it from you. The same thing. It moves into her and inhabits her too.

Or does this thing, whatever it is, like lightning, strike her, too? Separately? Hard to say, you say.

You move as one. The silence. The throat-constricting petrification. You both stand there. A deep and wild helplessness rises into all your joints, and makes them weak. And then this passivity moves into your joint consciousness. You and her. You want to be two *beasts*. Of burden. With no consciousness. With no knowledge. No responsibility for things you cannot change. No memory for things you'll never know. No nothing. Please, please. Let us feel no more, you say you said.

And so it comes about that together, the two of you, in silence and hurriedly, change her into a new cotton night gown, a greyish pink, and you put some newly knitted baby pink socks on her cold feet, and you arrange all the bedclothes neatly. You put a new pillowcase with yellow and orange genda flowers and a shrub of citronella of all things, embroidered on each of its four corners. You do this really quietly. Like in a morgue. Whispering strange prayers and catch phrases in some unknown tongue. Both of you. She caught the secretiveness from you, Aunt Paquerette did, you say. And then you doubt this again all over again. Is it that you both had it handed down separately, but from the same thing. You both mumble and mumble and mumble. Prayers you didn't know you knew come to your lips. The same words to both of you. If prayers they are. Maybe phrases or songs, maybe rituals or rites. Maybe ululations and variations on a tune.

Then the two of you pick up her child, fold him in your arms, and you run out, holding your heads falling backwards, away from the child, raising the alarm, and you go wailing in the street, crying out to the neighbours. 'Oh, what a terrible problem has come upon us!' You both cry this strange phrase. 'Oh what a terrible problem has come upon us!' As though divine intervention. Something sent to haunt you, it haunts you. You do not say the word death. Or illness. Or pain. Or loss, You say *problem*. You do not say *happened to us* but instead you say *come upon us*.

'Come out! Wake up! Please. Oh what a terrible *problem* has *come upon us!*'

Or are you afraid of the priest? Could you both be *that* afraid of him? To hide Honey's death? To risk her life? Could you have saved her life? Dare I ask that question? Is this why you confess? Could you have saved her? By calling neighbours and a nurse or a doctor at once? Mouth to mouth. Hit her hard in the chest. Cardiac resuscitation. Lie her head and shoulders over the edge of the bed. Physiotherapy to drain her breathing tubes. You know all about this, you do. So does Aunt Paquerette. Could she have lived? Your Honey? Maybe?

You don't know.

I can't measure all this. What is the priest to you?

What the priest could mean in your mind, or in yours and Aunt Paquerette's minds, is unknown to me. I cannot guess the exact nature of his place in your hearts. Or your great-grandmother's feelings for a priest under the circumstances she and some priest must have lived under, unmentionable circumstances.

Perhaps *he* will think it is suicide, today's priest. This is what he *will* think. And this is too much for you? Was it suicide, Honey's Mother? And refuse to let the body into the church, leave it out in its coffin in the glare of the sun, to rot the faster, right there in front of everyone's harsh eyes? Only to be buried in the *Hindu Section*? Do you think she drank something poisonous? That foam. Did it have any smell? Could it have been the result of Honey drinking poison?

No, she wouldn't. Loved life too much, to the full, you say. A hedonist, from what you say. Did that make you ashamed of her? Scared of the priest, are you? Priests are against pleasure. She loved pleasure. Honey did. She loved chocolates. Fluffy boleros. A drink. A joke. A laugh. A smoke. Sega dance. A surprise. Comic books. Jazz music. A hot stare. High heel-shoes. Hot curry. Probably sex. *Nisa*. Maybe even nirvana. She was perfect.

The doctor comes. You do send for him at some point. Eventually, later in the night, you and Aunt Paquerette have some young man half-drunk go on a bicycle and call him. Tell him to tell the doctor that *a terrible problem has come upon us*. Which is what the boy on a bicycle does say. The doctor comes quickly. He knows you and he knows Aunt Paquerette too. He walks through the silent crowd of neighbours who stand ever so still. Hovering in suspense. Words lost. Whites of eyes showing all round irises. He stops as he enters Honey's room. In the lintel. He takes one look, and you suppose he knows.

But he is a man of science. So he must check. He must check laboriously. And while he is checking, he must try and work out what has happened. With a small piercing torch that comes out of his bag, he checks in this eye, and then that one. Just in case. Some reflex closing of a pupil. Some sign. But by then it is late. Far too late. He even leans over to

see if there is some smell in the light foam that has reformed between her teeth. Then he asks everyone to leave, except you and Aunt Paquerette. He looks into your eyes and into Aunt Paquerette's and then at both of you. His eyes, you say, tell that he knows the unknown, his eyes know the unknowable. He knows me, you say. For the doctor, all this is beyond his calling. But, he is close to you, you say. Such a nice man, you say, as if this may take you away from your story. So he shares the moment with you. He asks if she has been ill. Flu last week, you say. He asks what she had had for supper. Same as you, you say. Ate *my* food today, doctor, you say. Leaf soup and dried fish and rice and some tomato chopped up with spices into a chutney. She pregnant, he asks, *been* pregnant? Not to your knowledge, you say. Where is the husband, he asks. They've gone to fetch him at the electronics factory, you say.

He shakes his head ever so slowly. Ever so sadly. For what seems like ages. Has he felt what happened to you? And to Aunt Paquerette? Does he know already that the doors to knowledge closed in front of both of you, despite both of you?

He looks at you. His eyes ask a deep question. But you won't tell him anything. Not because you don't want to. You yearn to. But because you don't know what to tell him. You have no idea what to say because you don't even know what happened. You have lost grip of things. He senses it. He knows it's all lost. All gone. All out of your reach already. Far far away.

He calls Aunt Paquerette over close by. Speaks quietly to her over his doctor's bag. And she answers quietly. You don't hear what they say. You just see their lips moving. They stand like that, the two of them. Like in a trance.

Then he comes over to you at the foot of Honey's bed. Death's bed. He says he is sorry, but he can't say what she died of, will therefore need to get a postmortem done, do you agree, he asks you.

You agree. You nod your agreement. So does Aunt Paquerette. She actually says the word 'Yes'. So does Roderick when he comes in. He can see it has to be done.

You organize the transport of her body to the hospital. Or someone does. You who know she is already dead and what's the point now. *But you want to know.* They'll cut her body up for nothing, you think, but you decide you want to let them. What does it matter if they replace her insides with bunched up bits of newspaper. Maybe even open up her head, you think, and you shudder. And yet, there is this part of you that persists, that wants to know after all. To know the truth. For sure. The modern part of you. Science. Trust in the doctor. The desire to leave the fear of the past. To move forwards. The part of you that could maybe perhaps who knows have saved Honey but didn't manage to.

A certain peace comes down on you when you know you will know.

Honey's body is out, away on a visit, a visit that will bring back know-

ledge. Certainty. A modicum of order. A glimpse of the enlightenment you want and need. The absence of her body is the promise of a parting gift from her. Temporary peace comes down. Like a shroud. In order. In harmony.

In all our history, it is so temporary this feeling of peace and of the rule of reason, I say this to you because it is the only words I can find.

You go on telling me what happens next.

Then, you say, some blue lady interferes. At the hospital while they are sitting around waiting for an autopsy. She is there for some other case, watching over some prisoner, and she just interrupts. You know her vaguely. She comes forward and says she knows the family. And she says no *need* to go through a postmortem. She says you never know what time the body will be given back. The police haven't got a case anyway, she says. So she gets some hospital doctor to sign some paper, and they bring Honey back all the way back again. Bring her back again without any answers. Just a death certificate. With some nonsense for cause of death. Burying another generation in mystery. Leaving you in doubt like this, in eternal doubt about her history.

And it is this that makes you go off your head a bit. Go slightly unstable, as you put it. Obviously it would, Honey's Mother. This is normal. You didn't do it. You didn't kill her.

'No,' I say, 'no, I *don't know* what she died of.'

How would I know? I mean if you don't know and the doctor didn't know, how on earth could I know? We never will know now. The knowledge is buried with her.

That doesn't mean you killed her, does it? Yes, you did act strange. Very strange. But it doesn't mean you killed her. You go to sleep now.

I know you haven't given me my message yet. It doesn't matter. Not tonight. Tomorrow you give it to me.

FAZLUL HUQ

Haran's Death

COMMENTARY & TRANSLATION FROM BENGALI BY OSMAN JAMAL

In the early 1950s Jasimuddin, a poet and an older contemporary, remembered Fazlul Huq in an autobiography as 'the greatest short story writer of Muslim Bengal'. Yet it was not until 1985 that a posthumous volume of three of Huq's short stories was published in Dhaka with an introduction by Shaukat Osman and Shamsur Rahman. A fourth story, 'Haran's Death', was subsequently discovered and added to the three in a later edition. Jasimuddin's accolade, if it were to be based on four short stories, originally published in 1944-45, would appear to be excessive. Nevertheless the quality of these stories do point to a promise which was cut short.

Fazlul Huq was born in 1917 in the Kishoregunj district of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). After his matriculation, he was sent to Calcutta to continue his studies at Presidency College. In choosing to read philosophy as an undergraduate, and, later, for his Masters degree at Calcutta University, he was probably influenced by Abu Sayeed Ayub. Ten years older than Huq, Ayub was a polymath. A physicist by training, he had turned to philosophy (which he taught at Calcutta University) and literature (on the state of which he passed magisterial judgement); he also attracted some of the best minds of India to his Wellesley Street apartment. Ayub's friendship with Huq was, no doubt, an important element in Huq's life.

From 1933 to 1945 Huq lived in the YMCA hostel on College Street. This period coincided with one of the most creative periods in the history of Bengali literature. Huq stood close to the centre of this literary ferment. Yet it is difficult to say if he saw himself as a writer (his father wanted him to enter the ICS, which he rejected for presumably political reasons). Professor Pritish Dutta, a lifelong friend, thinks he was more interested in reading (he had a large library of modern Western literature and thought), and notes that, though an introvert, he shone on account of his erudition and razor-sharp logic when he spoke at friendly gatherings. Perhaps it was the 1943 famine which impelled Huq to write the longest of his stories, about a village schoolteacher's conversion to socialism. This was published in the prestigious left-leaning literary magazine, *Parichay*, then edited by Sudhin Dutta. 'Fishing' and 'Grandmother' were published in *Chaturanga* and 'Haran's Death' in a magazine edited by Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Following the partition of India in 1947, Huq was persuaded to migrate to East Pakistan. This severed him from his social and intellectual milieu (Ayub stayed on in Calcutta). Towards the end of 1949 he took his own life. 'Haran's Death' intimates his profound pessimism about human nature, and his absorption with suicide.

Huq, according to his younger brother, Dr Mozammel Huq (to whose memory I would like to dedicate the translation), completed a novel he had worked on since 1946. The novel has not been traced.

HARAN'S DEATH

I stepped out of the house the moment I heard the news. I had always known Haran to be a self-possessed, mild mannered man; how could he do something so terrible? Weighty question; and its pressure so benumbed my mind I had no strength left to look for an answer. Nor did I expect there was one.

I came to my senses at the sight of old Bhattacharya. He was racing away. 'Hell-dweller!' he cried, meaning Haran. 'Great sinner!' He rushed off as if fleeing from the outstretched arms of hell. The old man infuriated me. Was religion devised to make man inhuman?

People from the neighbouring villages had already gathered at the place of incident when I got there. A small group formed around me. Rashid said, 'Have you ever heard such a story? Just like a milkman!' I had heard any number of stories, including the seven parts of the Ramayana, but I had no clue about Haran's. I couldn't grasp Rashid's innuendo, but that others did was obvious from their laughter.

How low an act had Haran committed, I wondered, that even by dying he could not command the sympathy of his fellowmen?

I would have preferred not to describe the conditions in which I found Haran, but the story wouldn't pass if I leave it out altogether. Haran was hanging at the end of a cow-rope from the branch of a mountain pine. The branch had cracked and swung to the right. Haran's tongue had come out and his teeth were clenched hard on it. Blood and saliva had oozed out of the corners of his mouth and of his eyes too. Most terrifying were his eyes – raised upward the eyeballs seemed to be bursting out of their sockets. I didn't have the courage to look at them a second time.

The police station was one and a half miles away. The village watchman had gone there with the news. Haran would have to hang until the police sub-inspector completed his investigation. There was no way of telling when he would arrive. It would take some time if he came by boat; if he came on his bike, he would probably come sooner. Until then people would loiter in little clusters on the edge of the fields of Kailamfula, on the country road and in front of Haran's hut. It wouldn't do to leave the hanged man alone. People were not content with cursing him. They were

seized with a frustrated aggression as if Haran had got off too easily, had cheated them. Only if his broken neck had snapped more severely and the clotted blood in his body had turned into leeches to inflict further pain, would Haran be considered to have expiated adequately for his imbecility.

Haran's wife, Bindi, had come out of the hut and walked up to the mound. Seeing her husband hanging from the tree, she hurled herself on to the ground and howled. 'Look at the whore's act,' Sattar, Rashid and some others sarcastically called out in a chorus. Haran's relatives promptly flung her back into the hut.

Meanwhile I heard the circumstances of Haran's suicide. When the crowd which had gathered round me felt that I was in the dark, they were all eager to tell me. Finally Sattar stopped the rest of them so that he might tell the story from the beginning to the end. His story did not stop at the rope that hanged Haran; in a mosaic of words Bindi's whole future stood clearly revealed before the lustful eyes of all. The lad had the gift of a storyteller.

I got up to go. I had seen with my own eyes that Haran had hanged himself and I had heard why he had done so; what was the point of hanging around? But Haran's uncle, Madhu, held me importunately in his arms. Who knows what trouble the police sub-inspector might create; would I not be around when he arrived? If I went home now, could I not come back when I received word about the police sub-inspector's arrival? 'We're ignorant people, Babu,' he pleaded.

It was not necessary to plead with me. It hadn't occurred to me that the police might create trouble; if it had I wouldn't have mentioned anything about going. As I resumed my seat, I heard the gruff voice of Tamizuddin Bepari: 'Now, Madhu, who knows when the police sub-inspector will get here. How about some tobacco...' Of course, it was only to protect this family of dairy farmers that Tamizuddin Bepari sat around Haran's body, basking in the winter sun of Kailamfula. Surely the dairy farmers must provide the tobacco for these people. Perhaps Haran's mother herself should light the charcoal for the hookah!

The police inspector was coming – he had taken his time. The river was drying up; it flooded out again; faces shone with enthusiasm, liveliness. One couldn't punish Haran for the crime he had committed, he was beyond all punishment. But if Haran was not there to receive punishment, his relations were. Let the police sub-inspector get at them – that would partially pacify the god of the people.

The police sub-inspector looked at the hanged man. The rope was shining where it cut against the neck. Observing it, he said, 'Waxed. Good, good, the lad used his brains to kill himself.'

Then he turned into a proper Sherlock Holmes. 'Candles aren't commonly found in a dairy farmer's home, are they? The lad spent money to hang himself, good, good.'

Madhu was summoned – he was the head of the family. Putting his

palms together, he looked on pathetically like a sacrificial cow. The police sub-inspector said, 'Do you think your nephew has hanged himself of his own will or do you suspect foul play?'

Madhu could not say a word in reply – he might as well have gone completely dumb. One or two people goaded him, 'Come on, say something.'

Madhu made an attempt to say something, it was not clear whether yes or no. But the sub-inspector laughed indulgently, 'Don't they say a milkman's son doesn't come of age until he's three-score years old?'

Laughter spread out all round at his remark. It was no longer possible for me to keep quiet. 'Even by the gentleman's estimate,' I said, 'Madhu is of age. He's long passed his sixtieth year.'

That was impertinence. The police sub-inspector rolled his eyes as if to say, Who's that impudent boy? But looking at me he refrained from making any comment, perhaps because I was nearer thirty and was clearly not a dairy farmer by caste.

The sub-inspector made out a report to the effect that Haran had committed suicide; he was released from the tree. His body would not be messed around, dissected, and nobody would be required to go to the town – a heavy weight was lifted off the chest of the dairy farmers. Haran's relations heaved a sigh of relief; the grief at Haran's violent death was hardly noticeable. I did not know at the time, but heard later, that Madhu's life-savings were exhausted to bribe the police sub-inspector and Tamizuddin Bepari (and his kind).

I was thinking of Haran. Sattar said Umesh had turned the whore's head, meaning Bindi, Haran's wife. Umesh, the son of the Talukdar, babu to the dairy farmers, went about in scented muslin shirts; he was fair, doe-eyed, his skin soft and smooth. It was quite possible for Umesh to turn Bindi's head. Shotgun in hand, Umesh walked about the dairy farmers' huts in search of birds – he'd had a sudden urge for shikar – as if all the doves in the world had come to the bamboo clumps behind the huts and to the trees around them. Madhu had once asked Umesh, 'How much do those cartridges cost, Babu?' Umesh told him.

'That much! What good is shooting doves, then?'

Umesh explained that Madhu would not understand the meaning of shooting for fun.

The meaning was not hard for anyone to understand, but who would stop Umesh? Within a few days of his wedding, in Sattar's words, Haran had become glued to his wife. He wouldn't go out of the hut if he could help it. When he did, it was only to look for scented oil, hair ribbons and such like. Perhaps he hadn't gone that far but he had undoubtedly fallen very much in love with his wife. Within five or six months of their wedding Umesh appeared on the scene. There was nothing new in it. There was never a law that the young women of the dairy farmers would not be available for Umesh's pleasure. It was said of Umesh's father that

when he entered Madhu's hut, Madhu came out on to the courtyard and smoked his hookah. But Haran had become disoriented; it was his desperate condition which prompted Madhu to muster the courage to ask Umesh, 'What good is shooting doves, Babu?' It is not certain if Madhu had given Haran any advice, but Haran regained his composure. The dairy farmers were relieved, perhaps assuming that Haran had accepted the inevitable. Sattar said that the situation was entirely different. Bindi's deception had set Haran's mind at rest. Bindi had persuaded Haran that he was her all, husband and god; that going round the farmers' huts, Umesh would only wear out his shoes. How could that harm Haran or Bindi? Then that evening Haran saw them – under the pomelo tree. Sattar described the scene in forceful language. Briefly, Umesh had no gun in his hand and Bindi had her arms round him.

Haran did not kill either his wife or Umesh; he put a rope round his own neck. For that he was showered with every abuse; all human contempt and hatred were heaped upon his hanged body, nothing spared. Everybody knew Haran loved his wife more than his life and Bindi herself had persuaded him that, if she was faithful, Umesh could do them no harm. Yet human hatred brooked no limits.

ROSHNI MOONEERAM

Prospero's Island Revisited: Dev Virahsawmy's *Toufann*

(In memory of my beloved mother, Nirmal Virahsawmy Mooneeram)

Dev Virahsawmy is the first post-colonial Mauritian playwright to use Creole as dramatic expression and remains the figurehead of the theatre in Creole. This article focuses on *Toufann* (1991) and the fascinating cultural and literary productions that have stemmed from the 'unexpected transfers'¹ of this translation/adaptation of *The Tempest* into Creole. In the post-colonial context, rewriting often begins as a specifically political project, out to challenge and overturn the ideological assumptions of Eurocentric canonical works. However, to see all post-colonial rewriting as a constant process of writing back to the centre is a limited view. In this article, I examine some of the strategies that make of *Toufann* an adaptation of *The Tempest* that opens up possibilities of other aspirations and needs, possibilities of other cultural productions; in other words, clear evidence that the absorption and transformation which Kristeva sees as inherent to all texts is in this instance a self-conscious and dynamic process.

Mauritius, an ex-French and British colony (1721-1810 and 1810-1968 respectively), independent since 1968 and proclaimed a Republic in 1992, is a multi-ethnic and multilingual island. While Mauritius stands at present at the crossroads of the Commonwealth and the Francophonie, it remains, above all, Creolophone. If English and French have the monopoly of institutional diffusion,² Creole is the mother tongue of an overwhelming majority of the population. Originating from early French colonization, Creole was seen as the slaves' deformed imitation of their masters' language, a corrupt form of French. Today with over a million speakers, and only second to Haitian as the most spoken French-based Creole, Mauritian Creole has proved itself essential enough to the sociolinguistic make-up of Mauritius to maintain its popularly recognized position. Despite its lack of official status, Creole has moved on considerably since independence both in terms of people's perception of it and in terms of the extension of the fields where it now functions. The use of Creole has been extended to literary productions, and with particular success, to the theatre.

Whereas until independence the dramatic culture in Mauritius was heavily dominated by English and French, the militant post-independence climate raised the awareness that Creole could be the means of a cultural and political liberation. With the pioneering work of Dev Virahsawmy and other

playwrights, such as Azize Asgarally and Henri Favory, Creole has emerged as a new form of literary expression, defying the prejudice directed against it. In a sociolinguistic situation where English and French have unparalleled prestige, the playwrights sought to put Creole on an equal footing with the two colonial languages. Creole became the privileged space where an authenticity previously denied could be reclaimed, and evolved into an increasingly potent symbol. The historian Decotter concludes that, by the mid-1980s, the growing popularity of plays in Creole constituted a turning-point in the history of the theatre in Mauritius.

Virahsawmy's later plays move away from the often stilted and didactic discourse of an earlier theatre of protest to explore a more dynamic vision. In a context where there is a growing confidence in the potential of Creole as the language of daily communication and culture, the promotion of the national language and literature no longer entails a rejection of English and French cultures. *Zeneral Makbef* (1981), which echoes Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, is the first play where Virahsawmy seeks inspiration from both local and foreign cultures, transcending – but not shunning – a Mauritian reality. In *Toufann*, he chooses a form of theatre which makes of Creole the meeting-point of foreign and local cultural currents, enhancing thereby 'the propensity of performance to achieve different meanings/readings according to the context in which it occurs'.³

Toufann is a Hindustani and Bhojpuri word for cyclone, a familiar natural occurrence in Mauritius. Bhojpuri, widely spoken in Mauritius, is of Indian origin but, having undergone changes in the course of translation over time and space, it has evolved into a different language from the Bhojpuri spoken in India. Not only is Mauritian Bhojpuri increasingly influenced by the Creole language it also feeds back into Creole which has appropriated several of its lexical items. The word 'Toufann' becoming itself text – manifold, diffuse – the title starts an intertextual argument that situates the play within a specific history and society. The adoption of a strategy of intertextuality, in its widest sense, does not imply movement across literary texts alone but includes symbolic texts, spoken language, social, cultural and historical resources. In other words, instead of focusing on a single model, *Toufann* adopts a broader heteroglossic strategy, transposing across one or several systems of signs, creatively adapting from more than one tradition, more than one type of text.

Trinculo and Stephano become 'Kaspalto' and 'Dammarro', stereotypical Mauritian names connoting a drunkard and a drug addict respectively, who discover abundant whisky-filled coconuts and marijuana fields on the island. Prospero's island is filled with high-tech computers, and his toufann is virtual reality. Aryel, Prospero's creation, is a robot with sensitive computer chips, programmed to carry out the three phases of his plan. The cultural productions that stem from the 'unexpected transfers' across time and space, across languages and cultures, bring about an island bubbling with dynamic re-creation, and endless possibilities.

Even the characters are self-consciously intertextual. Virahsawmy's play blurs the boundaries of his Shakespearean sources, as key characters from different works collide in *Toufann*. Prospero's daughter is 'Kordelia', a daughter carried across from *King Lear*, who embodies a new idea of community.⁴ Most interestingly, Antonio is turned into a self-conscious 'Yago', who expresses exasperation at being considered a villainous stereotype:

Yago: Mo'nn plen, plen, plen. Sak fwa enn zafér pa pè marss korek-korek, tou djimounn rod mwa. Bizen enn koupab? Sirman Yago sa. Depi ki sa bezsomin Shakespeare finn servi mwa pou li bez Othello ek Desdemone tou djimounn quar momem responsab tou problèm dan lemonn.

[*Yago:* I've had enough, enough, enough. Each time that things go wrong, everybody looks out for me. Do they need someone to blame it on? It must be Yago. Ever since that damned Shakespeare has used me to wreck Othello and Desdemona, everybody thinks that I am the one responsible for all the problems of the world. (p. 17)]

Yago: Mo esperé ki bann kritchik literèr konpran ki mo pa mové net.

[*Yago:* I hope that the literary critics will understand that I am not completely evil. (p. 21)]

As Yago re-emerges to claim redemption on Prospero's island, he fights back against his own construction and denies Shakespeare, and three centuries of critics, the final word. Characters become productive of textual meaning, resisting the notion of closure.

If Shakespeare's dramatic art cannot, as far as Virahsawmy is concerned, contain his characters, Prospero's high rhetoric cannot diminish the polyphonic voices that confront him. Nothing goes according to Prospero's plans. Ferdjnan is neither interested in a heterosexual relationship with Kordelia nor in leadership. Rejecting the older generation's obsession with the marriage-reproduction-inheritance package, he claims instead an alternative relationship with Aryel. Ferdjnan explains that an accident in the past did irretrievable damage to certain parts of his anatomy:

Ferdjnan: Dezir ou plezir sexiel pa enteress mwa. Dan Aryel mo trouv enn konpayon. Sé tou ... Dan zot lozik sa pa posib ... Dan mo lozik, li normal.

[*Ferdjnan:* I am not interested in sexual desire or pleasure. In Aryel I see a companion. That's all ... In your reasoning it's inconceivable ... In mine, it is normal. (p. 22)]

Aryel, who is both human and robot, is yet another cross-breed who has his computer chips disturbed when given a hug by Ferdjnan. Their alternative relationship in the play destabilizes binary distinctions between conceptions of the natural and the artificial, the normal and the abnormal, male and female.

In *Toufann*, furthermore, Kalibann is no longer the savage other but an intelligent and attractive young man, a 'metis' of mixed white and black ancestry, the issue of a white pirate and a black slave. Being a brilliant

technician, he is the only one capable of pursuing Prospero's scientific work. He has also won the love of Kordelia who is carrying his child. The Shakespearean Caliban's fantasy of impregnating Prospero's daughter, thereby populating the island with his progeny and reigning as king, becomes reality with Virahsawmy. In *Toufann*, Kalibann is the one who marries Prospero's daughter and takes over his grand project of habitation.

Toufann, however, does not limit its scope to mere parody of the colonial politics of *The Tempest*. As Arun Mukherjee claims in relation to Indian literature, 'our cultural productions are created in response to our own needs and we have many more needs than to "parody the imperialists"'.¹⁵ In his rewriting of *The Tempest*, Virahsawmy exploits social structures and historical realities that successfully connect with the audience's perception of life. Kalibann, the half-caste, is the concrete expression of the cultural practices that have shaped Mauritian society. His hybridity defies the boundaries that colonial communities create between what is included and what is excluded. The reappropriation of Kalibann is designed to debunk the prejudices against 'half-castes', and to overthrow the slave-master relationship that has, in various ways and under different forms, been part of the history of Mauritius. When Prospero loses his temper at Kordelia's decision to marry Kalibann, he is literally made to shut up. Kordelia assertively stops him from uttering the word 'bastard', and refutes his arguments about the superiority of *royal* blood by asserting her belief in *human* blood. It is an interesting coincidence that in Creole the word 'batar' refers to an illegitimate child as well as a legitimate child of a mixed marriage.

By taking the audience out of the ordinary onto a fantastic island where possibilities are endless and renewal is constant, *Toufann* creates a space where society's assumptions are exhibited and tested, where values are powerfully questioned. By pushing private – and often taboo – thoughts and prejudices into a public space, and offering a socio-historical context and rationale to a society which, despite its history, still very often frowns upon miscegenation, Virahsawmy provokes a revaluation of socio-cultural practices.

The Mauritian nation, constituted of migrant communities, cannot claim a common pre-colonial identity; the nation stands instead at the crossroads of various Eastern and Western influences. With Kalibann and Kordelia taking over, we have a renewed concept of community based on biological and cultural hybridity, a community revitalized on account of the prowess and resources of these symbolic figures, and which in turn gives them meaning and identity. By rewriting *The Tempest* within a Mauritian context, Virahsawmy then reads this society and history as texts, into which he inscribes himself and *Toufann*.

Finally, while *Toufann* continually arouses the possibility of a dominant pattern of meaning from a revisioning of *The Tempest*, this remains, nevertheless, only a possibility. Just as Virahsawmy's Prospero cannot cling to the ways of an old continuous tradition, and must accept the process of change and renewal, so *Toufann*, incorporating Shakespeare and Mauritian

Creole, traditional and modern popular theatres, becomes a perpetual movement of searching, creation and recreation, of boundary crossings, in terms of content as well as form.

Characteristically, at the conclusion of *Toufann*, there are signs that the new order is itself to be challenged. When all the characters are on board and ready to sail off, Dammarro and Kaspalto stir up a mutiny. In exasperation, Kordelia asks if they do not realize that the story is over. Dammarro complains that if a nobody, that is, Kalibann, can become king, why is it that he, the representative of the common people, cannot be crowned. Aryel informs him that he will ask the 'master' – it remains ambiguous whom Aryel is referring to: Prospero or the narrator or even the dramatist – to write a new story where they would eventually become king. The play refuses to establish a hierarchy between plot and subplot as it ends with the possibility that the subplot of Dammarro and Kaspalto might become the main plot in another dramatic version. *Toufann* seeks to consume its own biases by opening up the possibility of the future rule of the marginals.

Rather than run the risk of propagating an influence by contesting it, *Toufann* lays the emphasis on creative adaptation from more than one tradition. The movements of renewal through the integration of heterogeneous elements at the centre of the play are symbolic of the historical process that led to linguistic and cultural creolization in Mauritius. The play, like the character Kalibann, asserts its identity, not as a process of bastardization, or the static confrontation of cultures, or the mimicking of a foreign dramatic tradition but as a productive activity of ceaseless change.⁶ *Toufann* does not merely provide an insight into yet another post-colonial rewriting of Shakespeare, but gives a glimpse of the dynamic possibilities of literary and cultural productions of Mauritius through its Creole literary voice.

NOTES

1. Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.2.
2. Mauritius has retained English as the official language. English is, however, strictly speaking, nobody's mother tongue and its use is mainly confined to the written medium, to education, Parliament and the judiciary. Occupying a semi-official status and sometimes seen as a rival to English is French, which is acceptable in Parliamentary debates and is the privileged language of the media.
3. Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 33.
4. See Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester: Ellis Horwood, 1985).
5. Arun Mukherjee (1990), quoted in Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), p. 3.
6. From an English *Tempest* to a Creole *Toufann*, from a Creole *Toufann* to an English one, the story must necessarily continue somewhere else – *Toufann* is being translated into English and is due to be produced by Michael Walling in London in 1999.

George Elliott Clarke

EXILE

Your lost country floats – oily – in ether;
It floats while burning to ash. Your mind chars
Black because you pitch – moth-like – in the flames.
You salve your scorching brain with slave-trade rum –
The only gold you can own, corroding
Your liver. You turn everything to dreams.

When you think about it (when you can think) –
After all the lies that make nostalgia,
All the dead faces that occupy photographs,
All the sadistic, executed loves,
Your eyes itch and ache with water, then dry –
Curling like dead leaves – ready for sour fire.

NEGATION

My black face must look like murder to you.
I crabbed out crooked, near plots where apples
Rotted and woodlots slumped in peonage
And brothers were dangled from a gallows
To fatten rabid crows and newspapers.
No local Caliban slaved to root spells
From weeds, only jugs of rust-salted beer.

Le nègre negated, meagre, c'est moi:
A whiskey-coloured provincial, uncouth
Mouth full of lies, moth-eaten lyrics, musty,
Mutilated scripture. Her Majesty's
Nasty, Nofaskoshan Negro, I mean
To go out shining instead of tarnished,
To take apart *Poetry* like a heart.

AU TOMBEAU DE BISHOP

For Sandra Barry

Cruel scrutiny is your furious power:
It orders light – orcharded, hoarded fast
In your dark poems: miniature Bibles
Monstrous with agonies of pneumonia
And cranky Bedlams, storing sick mothers
Like just-hooked fish, their eyes jumpy with shock.

To dredge your poems is to grapple nightmares –
Offal of Presbyterian-depressed
Nouvelle-Écosse (its poverty of love,
Its raw, tubercular winters) – and snag
Images smelling of hookrust and flesh
Randy with death.

Photographic, spiky,
Your anthems dramatize the malicious,
Narrow cold that cankers our compassion
And blisters our dreams, freezing us into
This penal colony peninsula.

Peeling back our pitched ensembles of blossoms,
You expose our snow-riled landscape, our warped
Shacks, our nicest incests, our plums slumped in dirt.
Your metaphors pierce us like frigid spears
Or hot, Botticellian syphilis.
Accurate as aches, you chill and scald us.

Dread Elizabeth Bishop, seize our lives,
Anatomize them – like a liar's diary.
Your lyrics still inflict wounds choice eyes brave –
The lines slash sharp, bright, incendiary.

ECCLESIASTES 12

I remember God during these sweet years –
While the penniless, pensioned days are far,
And the stars birth sunflowers in a black garden,
And the moon shellacks the river with teal light,
And the young bride sleeps and the greyed husband
Stands in the doorway and stares at the night,
And entrepreneurs turn, blind, from windows,
And banks are flung open to assassins,
And lawyers moan, giving birth to money,
And vipers quarrel in the mouths of priests,
And poems wither away, leaving musick,
And the plump, elegant girls pluck apples,
And the pimp jollys his quarry with wine,
And desire charges each luscious limb,
And dragonflies darkle, gleaming through soot,
And the daughters of musick rise and go,
And the river shambles home, leaking stars,
And my fears melt like the dawn's silver fog,
And my poems are repeated by many.

Jackie Kay

LUCOZADE

My mum is on a high bed next to sad chrysanthemums.

'Don't bring flowers, they only wilt and die.'

I am scared my mum is going to die

on the bed next to the sad chrysanthemums.

She nods off and her eyes go back in her head.

Next to her bed is a bottle of Lucozade.

'Orange nostalgia, that's what that is,' she says.

'Don't bring Lucozade either,' then fades.

'The whole day was a blur, a swarm of eyes.

Those doctors with their white lies.

Did you think you could cheer me up with a Woman's Own?

Don't bring magazines, too much about size.'

My mum wakes up, groggy and low.

'What I want to know,' she says, 'is this:

where's the big brandy, the generous gin, the bloody Mary,

the biscuit tin, the chocolate gingers, the dirty big meringue?'

I am sixteen; I've never tasted a bloody Mary.

'Tell your father to bring a luxury,' says she.

'Grapes have no imagination, they're just green.

Tell him: stop the neighbours coming.'

I clear her cupboard in Ward 10B, Stobhill Hospital.

I leave, bags full, Lucozade, grapes, oranges,

sad chrysanthemums under my arms,

weighted down. I turn round, wave with her flowers.

My mother on her high hospital bed waves back.

Her face is light and radiant, dandelion hours.

Her sheets billow and whirl. She is beautiful.

Next to her the empty table is divine.

I carry the orange nostalgia home singing an old song.

THE SHOES OF DEAD COMRADES

On my father's feet are the shoes of dead comrades.
Gifts from the comrades' sad red widows.
My father would never see good shoes go to waste.
Good brown leather, black leather, leather soles.
Doesn't matter if they are a size too big, small.

On my father's feet are the shoes of dead comrades.
The marches they marched against Polaris, UCS.
Everything they ever believed tied up with laces.
A cobbler has replaced the sole, the heel.
Brand new, my father says, look, feel.

On my father's feet are the shoes of dead comrades.
These are in good nick. These were pricey.
Italian leather. See that. Lovely.
He always was a classy dresser was Arthur.
Ever see Wullie dance? Wullie was a wonderful waltzer.

On my father's feet are the shoes of dead comrades.
It scares me half to death to consider
that one day it won't be Wullie or Jimmy or Arthur,
that one day someone will wear the shoes of my father,
the brown and black leather of all the dead comrades.

PRIDE

When I looked up, the black man was there,
staring into my face,
as if he had always been there,
as if he and I went a long way back.
He looked into the dark pool of my eyes
as the train slid out of Euston.
For a long time this went on
the stranger and I looking at each other,
a look that was like something being given
from one to the other.

My whole childhood, I'm quite sure,
passed before him, the worst things
I've ever done, the biggest lies I've ever told.
And he was a little boy on a red dust road.
He stared into the dark depth of me,
and then he spoke:
'Ibo,' he said. 'Ibo, definitely.'
Our train rushed through the dark.
'You are an Ibo!' he said, thumping the table.
My coffee jumped and spilled.
Several sleeping people woke.
The night train boasted and whistled
through the English countryside,
past unwritten stops in the blackness.

'That nose is an Ibo nose.
Those teeth are Ibo teeth,' the stranger said,
his voice getting louder and louder.
I had no doubt, from the way he said it,
that Ibo noses are the best noses in the world,
that Ibo teeth are perfect pearls.
People were walking down the trembling aisle
to come and look
as the night rain babbled against the window.
There was a moment when
my whole face changed into a map,
and the stranger on the train
located even, the name
of my village in Nigeria
in the lower part of my jaw.

I told him what I'd heard was my father's name.
Okafor. He told me what it meant,
something stunning,
something so apt and astonishing.
Tell me, I asked the black man on the train
who was himself transforming,
at roughly the same speed as the train,
and could have been
at any stop, my brother, my father as a young man,
or any member of my large clan,
Tell me about the Ibos.

His face had a look
I've seen on a MacLachlan, a MacDonell, a MacLeod,
the most startling thing, pride,
a quality of being certain.
'Now that I know you are an Ibo, we will eat.'
He produced a spicy meat patty,
ripping it into two.
Tell me about the Ibos.
'The Ibos are small in stature
Not tall like the Yoruba or Hausa.
The Ibos are clever, reliable,
dependable, faithful, true.
The Ibos should be running Nigeria.
There would be none of this corruption.'

And what, I asked, are the Ibos faults?
I smiled my newly acquired Ibo smile,
flashed my gleaming Ibo teeth.
The train grabbed at a bend,
'Faults? No faults. Not a single one.'

'If you went back,' he said brightening,
'The whole village would come out for you.
Massive celebrations. Definitely.
Definitely,' he opened his arms wide.
'The eldest grandchild – fantastic welcome.
If the grandparents are alive.'

I saw myself arriving
the hot dust, the red road,
the trees heavy with other fruits,
the bright things, the flowers.
I saw myself watching

the old people dance towards me
dressed up for me in happy prints.
And I found my feet.
I started to dance.
I danced a dance I never knew I knew.
Words and sounds fell out of my mouth like seeds.
I astonished myself.
My grandmother was like me exactly, only darker.

When I looked up, the black man had gone.
Only my own face startled me in the dark train window.

KWADWO OSEI-NYAME, JNR

The Nation as Imagined Community: Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

The discussion by Chinua Achebe of significant aspects of the post-colonial moment in Nigerian history in *A Man of the People* (1996) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) does not only signal disillusionment with and alienation from important traditional bonds of kinship and community; it also articulates a search for new forms of affiliation within the context of what Benedict Anderson would describe as a nationally 'imagined community'.¹ This essay is concerned particularly with Achebe's 1960 novel, *No Longer at Ease*. It explores the ways in which Achebe represents competing versions of nationalist ideology within the nascent Nigerian nation. Much of the novel's reconstruction of Nigerian society in the years immediately preceding independence is dedicated to examining the socializing course which nationalism takes. Achebe's narrative suggests that the alliances sought by individuals and groups are integral to their visions of the development of the socio-cultural and political processes of Nigeria's post-colonial history. Achebe has argued that 'What Nigeria is aiming to do is nothing less than the creation of a *new* place and a *new* people.'² This view finds symbolic expression at several levels of the narrative in *No Longer at Ease*. The relationship between Clara Okeke and Obi Okonkwo, for example, seeks to initiate a new era of national politics, one which will enunciate the kind of progressive vision of national integration where 'anybody may marry anybody' (p. 68).³

Achebe's investigation into the condition of the Nigerian national community can be read within the framework of Ralph Grillo's observation that language is often inevitably politicized in the formation of the nation. As Grillo asserts, 'the politics of language are [always] about ways in which the domains of language use are defined by the [hegemonic] forces which determine those relationships'.⁴ We are given an early indication of the politicization of language in the moment of Obi's trial which begins the novel:

Mercifully he [Obi] had recently lost his mother, and Clara had gone out of his life. The two events following closely upon each other had dulled his sensibility and left him a different man, able to look words like 'education' and

'promise' squarely in the face. But when the time came he was betrayed by treacherous tears. (p. 2; emphasis added)

By focusing on the images of two women whom we have at this point not yet encountered, the narrative suggests the possibility for Obi of a more harmonious existence without these women. However, when we learn later that Clara, for example, is the one woman who has a particularly prominent place in Obi's personal narrative and in the specific form his imagination of the post-colonial Nigeria nation takes, the passage also clearly directs our reading towards its ironic significance. Achebe uses this incident as a means of analysing the contradictory responses of Obi to his situation. The passage serves as an indictment of Obi's inability to attain a union (or an identification beyond the sexual) with Clara, so that the language of the passage eventually acquires the effect, as Frazer and Cameron point out in another context, of how 'language has been constructed in such a way as to put women "outside" it, so that using language ... becomes, for women, a process of alienation from their own reality'.⁵ At this early point in his story, Achebe has effected a situation in which Obi's attempted repression of the memory of Clara serves also to emphasize some of the ambiguities attending the modern period for Nigerians such as himself.

The idea of community or 'nation' is also one which is legitimated by the modern Umuofians. The question arises in the narrative as to what the relocation of people from their traditional abodes connotes, and Achebe's narrative suggests that by leaving their 'home town to find work in towns all over Nigeria' (p. 4), the Umuofians construct for themselves a new identity within which Umuofia is given legitimacy as a town within the nascent Nigerian nation. In Benedict Anderson's terms, the movement to the centre or capital (here, Lagos) is indicative of the means through which individuals and groups transform themselves into a nationally 'imagined community'. Characterized as such, the pre-colonial village and town are now also part of the 'modern' world and part of the contested space of the nation set in 'disjunctive time'.⁶

The Umuofians however have a more ambivalent view of nationhood. They see themselves, for one thing, as merely visitors to Lagos, and their allegiance to communal bonds takes precedence over the idea of a common national identity. When the President of the Umuofia Progressive Union reminds Joshua Udo that his aim in coming all the way to the capital is to work, another Umuofian corrects the President's mistaken impression by informing him that 'it is money, not work' (p. 72) that has brought them to the city. Communal unity here militates against national interests.

For the urban Umuofians and for other constituencies within the Nigerian nation, the resources dispensed by the state may be appropriated in the desire for upward mobility and a national ethic of productivity must not be allowed to interfere with the promotion of personal wealth. The

pertinent issue here is the improper ethical values of individuals and groups within the new Nigerian nation, and the kind of cultural attitudes that are propagated and countenanced by their actions. Achebe uses these projections as a means of zeroing in on prevalent cultural attitudes in order to expose the ideologies which inform the behaviour of individuals and groups even as Nigeria endeavours to forge a coherent sense of national identity. In seeking a scholarship for his sister, Mark reverts to speaking Igbo in his bid to get Obi to do him a favour. For Mark and other Nigerians, social mobility can be achieved by forging a sense of identity which is contingent on an appeal to ethnic allegiances.⁷ Mark switches from speaking English to Igbo when the lines of communication break down between himself and Obi. Thus communication is seen as more open when an indigenous language is chosen over the modern one. By rejecting Mark's overtures outright when the latter appeals to their common culture by speaking Igbo, Obi reveals his conviction that the bonds of ethnicity are not adequate for the formation of a national community.

Communal solidarity apart, the Umuofians also identify themselves as active participants in the project of nation building. One of their primary concerns seems to be that nation-building must be accomplished through a conscious effort to 'make legitimate citizens'.⁸ The President of the Umuofia Progressive Union makes the point on behalf of the members:

We are pioneers in building up our families and our town. And those who build must deny ourselves many pleasures. We must not drink because we see our neighbours drink or run after women because our thing stands up. You may ask why I am saying all this. I have heard that you [Obi] are moving around with a girl of doubtful ancestry, and even thinking of marrying her. (p. 75)

In the new nation, the Umuofians consider that Obi's obligations to his community necessitates self-denial; Obi is their kindred and they are the custodians of tradition. For, as Michael Olisa has argued, '[b]eyond the family, the kindred is the closest-knit group to which the Igbo individual belongs and the most vital for his identity as a member of the total autonomous community'.⁹ In this connection, the Umuofia Progressive Union can 'achieve unanimity easily and can therefore think and act as a collectivity in both its internal affairs and in the affairs of the town [or nation]'.¹⁰

Within the terms of the President's speech, Obi's desire for a girl of 'doubtful ancestry' is evidence of the perverse nature of his sexuality and his individualism. Obi's headstrong behaviour signals further the threat to the community of Umuofia which Obi's marriage to Clara Okeke, an *osu*, is likely to occasion. Achebe's story of the Nigerian nation evokes a discourse which illustrates the relevance of Doris Sommer's argument about the direct relationship between 'conjugal passion' and 'modern patriotism', and within the context of what Sommer describes as 'a history of national and familial consolidations'. If 'romance' within the modern

nation, as Doris Sommer argues, is 'fuelled by a patriotic, productive mission' then the Umuofians see the relationship between Clara and Obi as detrimental to the wider project of nation-building.¹¹ In their eyes, Obi is incapable of either 'coordinating feeling with reason [or] passion with productivity'.¹² As we learn from the narrative, Obi's friend and confidant, Joseph, informs the President of the Umuofia Union about 'Obi's engagement to an outcast girl ... in the hope that he might use his position as the father of Umuofia people in Lagos to *reason* privately with Obi' (p. 82; emphasis added).

Through the responses of Joseph and his fellow Umuofians, Achebe engages in a pointed critique of the exclusivist attitudes which Obi attempts to transgress in his search for a suitable union with Clara. For Achebe, the attitude of the Umuofians also indicates, as he states in a lecture, one of 'the many manifestations' within which 'society itself, can pressure, can begin to act' so that the relationship between the individual and his or her society is determined by the power of 'authority'. This kind of relationship is one in which the individual always inhabits a subordinate role and 'has always been problematic' and therefore 'raises the wider issue of the nature of the [national] story'.¹³ Obi's obligation to his community is perceived as more important than his personal desire, particularly as his desire for Clara, an *osu*, is seen to conflict with the Umuofian's familial and communal traditions. When the Umuofians censure Obi for what they consider to be his irresponsible behaviour, they also seek to identify a point of connection between his sexual deviance and his lack of a proper sense of communal responsibility. If the Umuofians are forced to ponder the question of the nation by invariably connecting the question of national development with Obi's individualism and his sexuality on the one hand, and Clara's identity on the other, there seem to be legitimate reasons for their doing so. In citing the reasons for their disappointment with Obi, the President of the Umuofians in Lagos, does not merely suggest the primacy of the familial network, he intimates also that there is a continuity between the proper organization of familial life and the sustained reproduction and development of the national body. However, there are contradictions inherent in the Umuofians' appeal to the idea of a community, and a nation, problems which also impinge upon the self-interest of individuals like Obi and Clara.

As the nationalist historian, Paul Stern argues, while '[t]he genius of nationalism as a social invention is to equate the nation symbolically with family and community', such equations also 'generate emotions and ... elicit behaviour that is against the self-interest and the interest of other groups with which people identify - including, ironically, *families* and *communities*'.¹⁴ From Obi's perspective, the Umuofians' attitude to his alliance with Clara would also impinge upon his own 'self-interest' and upon the alternative familial bonding which the consummation of his relationship with Clara will articulate. Homi Bhabha would argue that

such an ambivalent legacy of tradition as constitutes the Umuofians on the one hand, and Clara and Obi on the other, engenders a liminal space of culture, one in which 'the discursive conditions of enunciation ... ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity', while also guaranteeing that 'the same signs can be appropriated, translated and rehistoricized and read anew'.¹⁵

The Umuofians denounce further Obi's irresponsibility and his misplaced sense of duty:

That is what Lagos can do to a young man. He runs after sweet things, dances breast to breast with women and forgets his home and his people. Do you know what medicine that *osu* woman may have put into his soup to turn his eyes and his ears away from his people? (p. 145)

We can surmise that the Umuofians' indictment of Obi as, 'without doubt, a very foolish, and self-willed young man' (p. 5) speaks not only to their disappointment that Obi has undermined the patriotic mission they envision for him when they sent him to England 'to read law so that when he returned he would handle all their land cases against their neighbours' [Obi reads English instead] (p. 6). The Umuofians' indictment of their kinsman speaks particularly to their evaluation of Obi as a man who demonstrates a failure of imagination regarding the choice of an appropriate female partner to facilitate the reproduction of legitimate national citizens.

In their search for legitimate forms of alliances, the Umuofians regard the possibility of Clara's marriage to Obi as an illegitimate union, a marriage which will be counterproductive to the search for authentic forms of identity within the Nigerian nation. Because the Umuofians perceive Obi's relationship with Clara and his potential marriage to her not only as a sign of his misguided individualism, but also of a lack of proper commitment to communal and national values, Obi's relationship with Clara further provides a means of demonstrating how the 'constructions of love and country' become 'promising for a meditation on modernity in general and nationalism in particular'.¹⁶ At the meeting which the Umuofians hold to discuss Obi's bribery case, one of them again illustrates his disappointment with Obi: 'We paid eight hundred pounds to train him in England ... But instead of being grateful he insults us because of a useless girl' (p. 4).

Achebe's narrative is also designed, however, to reveal the contradictory ways in which the nation is imagined by the individuals and groups within it. For the majority of the Umuofians, the nation is an alien concept:

'Have they given you a job yet?' the chairman asked Obi over the music. In Nigeria the government was 'they'. It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people's business was to get as much from it as they could without getting into trouble. (p. 29-30)

Censuring Obi for his so-called improper conduct, they reveal their own corruption. Achebe specifically focuses on the behaviour of Umuofians, such as Christopher and Joseph, as a means of prosecuting a critique of the politics of individual self-consciousness. Joseph, for example, has a string of girl friends whom he abandons each after the other, and the callousness of Christopher, a London-trained economist, is revealed in his unrepentant confession to Obi: 'When I was in the East a girl came to me and said: "I can't find my period." I said to her: "Go and look for it."' (p. 131). Sexual promiscuity and irresponsibility become recurrent tropes for the domination of women. The narrative highlights the selfishness of politicians, like Sam Okoli, who combine a sheer adulation of materiality with their sexual promiscuity in ways which are detrimental to the health of the new nation. If the Umuofians indict Obi for his perverse sexuality and his individualism, then Achebe suggests that, by their own behaviour, the Umuofians themselves negate the authority by which they criticize Obi. *No Longer at Ease* thus reveals a concern with the question of commitment. At the end of the day, along with people like Christopher and Joseph, Obi is also censured since his eventual abandonment of Clara is another iteration of Achebe's deep concern that relationships within the nation be defined by a sense of responsibility.

Through his representation of Clara, Achebe confronts the problem of nation-building, and the contradictions of the nation's exclusivist agenda. Clara's identity is signified from different positions within the nation's multiple cultural and socio-historical contexts, and from both the traditional and modern viewpoint. Although an *osu*, and an outcaste, whose status derives from the traditional practices of exclusion which marginalize people of her kind, she reinvents her self within the new nation, and the grounding of her new identity within culturally legitimate forms of socialization is consistently suggested, for example, in the fact that she hums 'popular song[s]' (p. 84).

As a 'been too' (p. 85), Clara is a product of the cosmopolitan culture associated with modern Nigeria and this makes her a potential contributor to the development of the nation. She is one of the group of young students and intellectuals sent abroad on merit to be trained in various professional positions and, like Obi and Christopher, she emerges as an important figure, one whose usefulness acquires a value within the structures of social and cultural organization which define a national body. In other words, Clara's renegotiation of her identity is grounded upon a simultaneous marginalization and inclusion in her community's past tradition, for, as Homi Bhabha argues in a different context, '[t]he recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification'.¹⁷ Thus Clara's profession as a nurse provides a clear instance of her usefulness; both literally and symbolically, she contributes to the health of the new nation. But while her profession as nurse enables her to administer to people afflicted with diseases, Clara's other identity as an *osu* is

unfortunately related as a disease which the Umuofians uphold as detrimental to their project of nation-building. Through Clara, Achebe grapples with the contradictory claims of national identity. It is obvious that Clara escapes total marginalization by fashioning for her self a new identity and a new position within the national community. Achebe seems concerned with the relationship between, on the one hand, Clara's 'subaltern' status which marginalizes her within society, and on the other, the openings her identity as a post-colonial subject provides for a reimagining of the idea of the 'nation'.

Through Clara, Achebe evokes the memory and destiny of not only the *osu*, who in *Things Fall Apart*, are 'set apart – a taboo for ever, and [their] children after [them]' from the community, but also the contemporary existential predicament of traditional figures of subalternity within the new national community. Clara is representative of the marginalized in traditional society who aspire to new positions in society within the Nigerian nation. Through Clara, Achebe suggests that a nation in search of new ideals and values must incorporate everyone into its national body. Clara's search for an alliance with Obi is complicated further by the attitudes not only of the Umuofians in Lagos but also of the new Christians in Umuofia, such as Obi's father, Isaac Okonkwo. Like the Umuofians living at the heart of the national community, Lagos, Isaac Okonkwo is deadset against the relationship. He considers Clara's father, Josiah Okeke, 'a good man and a great Christian. But he is *osu*' (p. 121), and he goes on to point out:

Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you my son, not to bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children's children unto the fourth and third generations will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children. *Who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your sons marry?* Think of that my son. We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters. (p. 121; emphases added)

Okonkwo is persuaded, like the modern Umuofians in Lagos, that Obi's marriage to Clara will produce a community of unacceptable children and thus illegitimate citizens. While the authority Obi mobilizes to challenge his father derives from his conviction that he speaks in favour of the new forms of alliances and identifications sought within the modern Nigerian nation, and while Obi perceives himself as a representative of the new nation, fellow Umuofians and modern Nigerians, like Joseph, share Isaac Okonkwo's rigid stance. As with Isaac Okonkwo the modern Umuofians presume a direct relationship between familial affiliations on the one hand and national development on the other in a way which seems to escape Obi.

Through Isaac Okonkwo, Achebe delves into the inconsistencies

characterizing the attitudes of the early African Christians. Nwoye's defiant stand against tradition and the authority of his father, Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, is with the hindsight of history rendered paradoxical. In much the same way as Nwoye questioned the authority of tradition in *Things Fall Apart*, Obi repudiates the authority of tradition by exploiting the dissonances within its discourses, and by drawing his authority from the same Christian doctrines to which his father adheres. As Obi informs his father, 'The Bible says that in Christ there are no bond or free' (p. 120).

From Obi's viewpoint then, his marriage to Clara will be a bond constituting precisely the kind of fresh interconnections and alliances needed to knit the Umuofians into a coherent national community. Clara's relationship with Obi speaks to Achebe's desire for an all-inclusive nation in which the mobility of individuals and groups would not be inhibited by the uncritical discourses of exclusion. In censuring the Umuofians, in questioning the inconsistencies of their ideology, and in asserting through his representation of the relationship between Clara and Obi the possibility that the independent Nigerian community will accommodate everyone, Achebe's narrative makes a claim for an appropriation by the nation's members of all its valuable resources.

In this connection, in *No Longer At Ease*, Achebe prompts us to read the story of the homecoming of Clara and Obi as an allegory of the nation. This section of the narrative is strategically located at the point when Clara, Obi, Stephen Udom and other Nigerians are 'returning [from London] to Nigeria the same day on the same boat' (p. 19). Achebe places the homecoming of the modern Nigerians at a significant moment in the narrative, intimating the extent to which the actions of Clara, Obi and other Nigerians, like Stephen Udom, are related to the forms of consciousness which these individuals embrace. Achebe represents the 'fitful progress' of the ship on which these individuals are travelling as symbolic of the movement of Nigeria/Africa from colonialism to independence, and positions the different characters as members of an international African community. On the ship there is a genuine feeling of neighbourliness, a sense of each one caring for the other, seen partly in Obi's concern over Macmillan's fall, and in Clara's caution to Macmillan about the 'tawdry trinkets' (p. 25) which he purchases.

Achebe locates the return of these individuals in the liminal space of culture as 'a mediatory movement between what was and what will be'.¹⁸ Read as an allegory of the nation, the disposition of Achebe's narrative differentiates between the identities of individuals by highlighting the reality of their existential situations within the Nigerian nation. While the overthrow of colonial power is signalled in the fact that Macmillan, the British colonial 'administrative officer in Northern Nigeria' (p. 20) is 'heard ... treading heavily and briskly and then fall[ing]' (p. 22), Obi rolls 'from one edge of the bed to the other in sympathy with the fitful progress of the ship'. (p. 22), or the nation. Achebe's textual strategy here invokes

that 'special kind of language use which, like metaphoric speech, symbolic language, and allegorical representation, always means more than it literally says'.¹⁹

Love and responsibility to the Nigerian nation play a pivotal role in determining the course of the narrative, and Achebe offers us insights into the way the characters interact. Throughout the journey, in spite of Obi's effort to reciprocate what he believes to be Clara's hostility towards him through his 'rehearsed' 'coldness and indifference' (p. 21), he is 'completely overwhelmed' (p. 21) by Clara's sensitivity to his sea-sickness. In this play of emotion and authority, Clara's composure is set against Obi's loss of control. But Clara, apart from noticing that Obi is not 'looking well' (p. 21), is generally responsive to the plight of her fellow travellers for she provides 'enough [tablets] for all the passengers' (p. 22). Achebe represents Clara as a woman attuned to the needs of her community, and points poignantly to the fact that she realizes she must locate her existence within the context of her *usefulness* to others. If Clara will have any role within the new nation, it is thus identified through her humane disposition. Critics have discussed Achebe's novel without accounting for its female perspective and have thus ignored, as Patrocínio Schweickart asserts in another context, the project of affirming 'womanhood as another, equally valid paradigm of human existence', and 'of recovering, articulating, and elaborating positive expressions of women's point of view in spite of the formidable forces that have been ranged against it'.²⁰ Reading the figure of Clara in order to establish the relationship of women to the nationalist text compels an emphasis on women's point of view, one which retrieves the stories from all levels of the text's signification.

Clara, very much aware of the objectifying gaze of Obi and other men, signals this awareness through her initial hostility to Obi (p. 19) while at the same time leaving herself open to a proper relationship with Obi founded upon love. Throughout their relationship back home in Nigeria, Clara is always sensitive to Obi's needs and this enables Obi to begin to contemplate the real meaning of love:

Until Obi met Clara on board the cargo boat *Sasa* he [Obi] thought of love as another grossly over-rated European invention ... he had been quite intimate with a few in England ... But these intimacies which Obi regarded as love were neither deep nor sincere. There was always part of him, the thinking part, which seemed to stand outside it all watching the passionate embrace with cynical disdain ... With Clara it was different. (p. 63)

While his previous encounters with women mark his quest for Clara as a desire for sexual fulfilment, rather than as a search for genuine love, Obi is very much disoriented when his expectations fail to materialize. When they first met at a dance for African students in London, 'Obi had been struck by her beauty and followed her with his eyes around the hall' (p. 19). While entranced by her beauty, Obi also imagined Clara to be one of

his 'victims'; however, the emphasis on Clara's aloofness serves also to expose Obi's views about women as invalid. Obi's disorientation is complicated further by the fact that, when they met the second time on their journey home, 'Clara had treated him just like another patient' (p. 22). That Obi is very much 'flustered' (p. 19) by Clara points to Achebe's argument that she must be identified on grounds other than her sexuality.

It is interesting that Macmillan and Obi in turn employ the terminology within which nationalist discourse objectifies 'woman'. Macmillan asks, 'How old do you think Miss Okeke is?' while Obi's idolization of 'woman' as a timeless and ahistorical object of beauty leads him to reply, 'Women and music should not be dated' (p. 24). In Achebe's critique of male nationalist ideology, Obi equates Clara with spirituality, with 'music', with 'the true self, the traditional/spiritual sense of place', which 'is exiled from the processes of history'. As Radhakrishnan argues further, 'The result [of such a project] is a fundamental rupture, a form of basic cognitive dissidence, a radical collapse of representation' within the male nationalist text.²¹

Discussing the eventual collapse of the relationship between Clara and Obi, Palmer comments that Clara's

motives for breaking off the engagement are obscure. Clara's conduct is implausible and we are given no insight into her feelings which might explain it. The affair is destroyed not by the clash between the old and the new, but by Clara's unreasonable behaviour.²²

Palmer's view does not take account of Obi's contribution to the break-up of the relationship. *No Longer at Ease* also evokes the tragedy of Obi's relationship with Clara as a consequence of his vacillating attitude, in particular his inability to sustain the relationship beyond its sexual attractions. Obi is thus neither a victim of tradition nor of Clara but of his own attitude.²³ Achebe relates Obi's tragedy as a failure to maintain his sense of responsibility and to affirm a will to pursue his otherwise laudable ideals. As Abiola Irele asserts, part of Obi's tragedy is that, in spite of his idealism, he ends up being 'a man with a narrow sense of values' because 'his application [of his idealism] is limited to specific delimitations, rather than to the total field of his social situation'.²⁴

Achebe's reflection on the politics of his nation through the relationships established between Clara and Obi, and between the pair and other Umuofians, hints at the limitations he perceives in the concept of nation-building as a whole. Reiterating his desire for a new sense of community and for a rejuvenative politics, Achebe intimates that, if there is any validity in the affirmation that the nation is an imagined community, this community can be remoulded through social and cultural interaction. Using his narrative as a commentary on societal relations, Achebe reveals his conviction that the identity of progressive minded individuals, such as Clara, within the new nation cannot be circumscribed by the logic of

exclusivism. This philosophical position is also articulated in Achebe's affirmation in his essay, 'The Truth of Fiction', that the imagination provides the individual with the ability to create 'a different order of reality from that which is given' and enables one 'a second handle on existence'.²⁵

Achebe's representation of Clara's relationship with Obi appraises how the crises of identity within his community makes the project of nation-building an agonizing one. For, though Clara and Obi occupy central positions within the new nation, they both end up being marginalized. Clara suffers the disadvantages of being an *osu*, while Obi's idealism is undermined both by his own lack of resolve and by the pressures of community. Achebe's deliberation on the question of national identity in *No Longer at Ease* is most relevant in a contemporary era marked by the search for viable forms of identification within the Nigerian nation. One notes in Achebe's reflections his persistent concern with still problematic attitudes relating to tradition and culture. His concern is to relate how such attitudes hinder the formation of a coherent sense of national identity, and he suggests that exclusions based on unjustifiable grounds are detrimental to the general well-being of the national community. Achebe's argument draws its strength and validity from its symbolism, for he represents the contradictions within society as indicative of some of the anxieties informing nationalism's construction of a narrative of identity. The disharmonious relations of his characters emerge as pivotal to Achebe's representation of the Nigerian nation's failure to forge a legitimate sense of identity.

NOTES

1. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). For other essays on the 'nation', see *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), particularly the essays by Doris Sommer, Geoff Bennington and James Snead. Snead's essay, 'European Pedigrees/African Contagions: Nationality, Narrative, and Communality in Tutuola, Achebe and Reed', pp. 231-49, is particularly illuminating on Achebe.
2. Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (London: Heinemann, 1988), p. 116; emphasis added.
3. Chinua Achebe, *No Longer At Ease* (London: Heinemann, 1987). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
4. Ralph Grillo, 'Anthropology, Language, Politics', in *Social Anthropology and the Politics of Language*, ed. Ralph Grillo (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 8.
5. Elizabeth Frazer and Deborah Cameron, 'Knowing What to Say: The Construction of Gender in Linguistic Practice', in *Social Anthropology and the Politics of Language*, p. 27.
6. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation', in *Nation and Narration*, p. 294.

7. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), provides a detailed account of the origins and patterns of pre-modern and modern processes of national formation and the role of ethnicity in them.
8. Doris Sommer, 'Love and Country in Latin America: An Allegorical Speculation', in *Reimagining the Nation*, eds. Marjorie Ringrose and Adam J. Lerner (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1993), p. 29.
9. Michael Olisa, 'Igbo Politics and Governance', in *Groundwork of Igbo History*, ed. A.E. Afigbo, (Lagos: Vista, 1991), p. 165.
10. Olisa, 'Igbo Politics', p. 165.
11. Sommer, 'Love and Country', p. 29.
12. Sommer, 'Love and Country', p. 31.
13. See 'Achebe Reading to his Swedish Audience', in Raoul Granqvist, *Travelling* (Umeå: Umeå University, 1990), p. 2.
14. Paul C. Stern, 'Why Do People Sacrifice for their Nations?', in *Perspectives on Nationalism and War*, eds. Paul C. Stern and John Comaroff (Sydney: Gordon and Breach), p. 115; my emphasis.
15. Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Commitment to Theory', in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 37. For a fruitful discussion of the uses of space in the novel, see Simon Gikandi, 'Chinua Achebe and the Poetics of Location: The Uses of Space in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*', in *Essays on African Writing: A Re-evaluation*, ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993), pp. 1-12.
16. Sommer, 'Love and Country', p. 30.
17. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 2.
18. Victor Turner, 'Comments and Conclusions', in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara Babcock (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 279.
19. Hayden White, 'Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased: Literary Theory and Historical Writing', in *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 24-25.
20. Patrocinio Schweickart, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading', in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, Contexts*, eds. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 50, 51.
21. R. Radhakrishnan, 'Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity', in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaegar, (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 85.
22. Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel: A Critical Study of Twelve Books* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 70.
23. For a different treatment of Obi's shifting attitude, see Philip Rogers, 'No Longer at Ease: Chinua Achebe's Heart of Whiteness', *Research in African Literatures*, 14.2 (1983), pp. 165-83.
24. Abiola Irele, 'The Tragic Conflict in the Novels in Chinua Achebe', in *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, eds. C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 16.
25. Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments*, pp. 95-6.

ELIZABETH COOK

Words for Blue

He knew he was kind but wished he were more assertive. So the way he had intervened over the girl surprised and heartened him. He had gone to his local electricity showroom to pay his bill and she was in front of him, at the window. The woman behind the glass was explaining that the electricity could not be turned on in her flat until someone settled the account that the previous tenant had left unpaid. The girl seemed to have no comprehension. She looked bewildered as she repeated what seemed to be her only words: 'I use no light. Why I must pay? I need light.' He noticed that each time she was about to say 'light' she had to pause. There was a moment of internal grappling before the word could be fetched up. The woman behind the window looked at him in appeal as she slid a form out to the girl. It was then that he had stepped in so masterfully. 'Wait one moment,' he said, gently moving the girl aside, his hands on her shoulders. He paid his own bill briskly, snapping his wallet shut after the transaction, tucking it suavely back into his inner pocket. He was conscious of something exemplary in his behaviour. Then he guided the girl by the elbow to the far end of the counter, out of the way of the other customers, to give her – and her form – his full attention.

He had to coax the information out of her. Her name? Something oriental but he couldn't place it. Previous address? This was her first in England. Name and address of landlord? The form completed he returned to the window and explained, with some force, that it was clearly the duty of the landlord to settle the unpaid bill and that in the meantime the days were getting shorter and colder and the girl needed heat and light. If they didn't reconnect her that day he would report the matter to social services.

He invited her to a cup of tea after that. Not in his flat – though it was near – but at a cafeteria round the corner. He thought she had the most beautiful eyes, cased in neat lids, but it was her mouth that he found himself watching with wonder and delight. It was so full; like two soft pillows which would sometimes go taut as she half-whispered the words she was unsure of, only to relax again into cushiony fullness as she waited for his reply. He escorted her to her door and on the way pointed out his own. 'If you need any help at all – and if your lights don't come on – just knock. I'm usually there in the evenings.'

She called the following evening, carrying a cake as a gift, to say that her electricity had now come on and to thank him. He invited her to join

him in the meal he was about to make and after the meal he played records and drew more words from her about her life. A friend of hers had written that she would have work if she came to England. With the money from her job – which had something to do with paintings – she would be able to help her mother who was a widow and badly off. Her friend had found her the flat, but it was on the other side of London from her work and from where her friend lived. London was so big. Where she came from all her friends and family lived nearby.

Their friendship grew. Within two months of their meeting he had invited her to live with him; the pillows of her lips became his own mouth's resting place. He loved the small changes she brought into his life: fresh flowers on the table, scented sachets nestling among his clothes. And always there were cakes. She took a child's delight in colour and sweetness and she to him was a bright sweet thing. He could not believe his luck.

Her English grew with the acquisition of nouns. She spoke in captions rather than sentences, and the captions formed no commentary on the ideas they named. Lacking the grammar for opinions she simply labelled the items in her world: light, coffee, cake, love, more, kiss, please. He found this adorable and would teach her more: fern, hyacinth, percolator, nipple, penis, come.

He even helped her to find a class where English was taught in intensive three-hour sessions on Monday and Thursday evenings. He missed her on these nights but took pleasure in preparing a meal to delight her with when she came home. Her application was touching. She looked like a schoolgirl when she set out, clasping books and pens, her homework painstakingly copied in the script she had learnt to make with such difficulty. When she drew the letters it was as if she were drawing a plant, so anxious was she to get the lineaments right. The tip of her tongue would protrude from her teeth as she concentrated. At other times she would sit cross-legged on the floor, poring over one of her books and mouthing the words she found; she would barely breathe out the secrets she was taking in. He had given her a pullover – an enormous pink one of soft angora – and when she sat in it, so intent on her books, he would want to gather her up and crush her softness to him; his own little flower.

One evening he found her, not at her books but painting. It was summer and the evenings were long and light and she had set up an easel beside the window where the light could fall over her shoulder as her left hand worked. He came over and looked. There was a circle and in it were drawn crowds of figures. Men, women, animals, birds, trees – all crammed on top of one another. It didn't look natural. 'What's this?' he said. 'Are they making you take work home with you now?' She laughed. 'This not my job. This *my* work. This me.' Then she went on, dipping a fine brush into some red paint that she'd smeared onto a board, applying it to different parts of the circle. It was a funny way to paint; one colour at a time.

He hovered for a while, watching her. She seemed not to notice. 'Are

you hungry?' he asked after an hour or so. 'Not now,' she smiled. 'I eat sandwich before.' 'Well I'm starving,' he announced after a pause. 'I'm going to get something to eat. You sure you don't want any?' But again she was painting and didn't reply. He made a lot of noise as he got his meal ready. The cutlery drawer he dragged out with such violence that it fell, emptying half its contents onto the floor. When he turned on the tap to fill the saucepan the water bounced off the bottom and sprayed everywhere, soaking his shirt and trousers. 'Shit, shit, shit, SHIT. Why doesn't anything fucking WORK in this place.' She hurried over to see what was wrong. 'It doesn't matter,' he said sulkily. 'You get back to your picture.' But she didn't, and he was glad that she sat with him as he ate his meal. Later she unwrapped the foil from a cake she'd made and had some with him.

But she went on with her painting. All the times when she wasn't studying her English she was at it. The English he'd encouraged, helped her with – in spite of the fact that it took her away from him. Now, with this painting lark, it was like he'd given her an inch and she'd taken a mile. He hadn't thought she was like that.

Yet sometimes she needed his help. One day she came home later than usual and sank tired into a chair. 'For days I try to find this colour I need. I go everywhere and I say I need this blue and they say which one but I don't know how it's called in English.' And he had been very patient and very kind and told her all the names for blue that he knew and, since these were few, had gone to his thesaurus to seek out more so that in the end he recited a litany of blues: azure, cobalt, cyan, indigo, cerulean, perse, prussian, navy, sapphire, turquoise, ultramarine.

They meant nothing to her. 'How can I know from words? I have to see.' Never before had he seen her so passionate or urgent. 'This blue I need is very...' she paused to find the word, 'expensive...very...religious. When I put it in my picture it makes my picture...religious. It mean where the soul live when it...finished.' What queer ideas she had. He kissed the top of her head. 'Don't you worry little flower. We'll find your blue for you.'

She found it. She knew that the colour she needed came from a stone – a precious one. She sought out a gem shop and looked until she came across a piece of lapis lazuli. The name was propped up against it on a handwritten card and she inscribed it carefully in her notebook and also in her heart. Soon after she bought the paint she needed.

Her English had by now – as you will have noticed – greatly improved. She now had verbs, tenses and adjectives to articulate her nouns and make them move. Her language world had advanced beyond the material; her speech was no longer a matter of labelling. Able to understand more of what was said she began to disagree. One day a Salvation Army band was making music in the street. When she asked him about them he answered laughingly and she flared up. 'You always laugh and think you

are so special. Why are they stupid people to make their music to God? You always think other people and their clothes stupid but not you. You think I look funny. I tell you. When I come here I think you all with your big noses ugly.' He had stroked her blue-black hair and tried to soothe her. 'I don't think you look funny,' he'd said. 'I think you're beautiful.' But he was hurt. And that night he looked at her and he thought her eyes were snakey.

In spite of her growing vocabulary, they seemed to talk less rather than more these days. Her studying had turned into reading and when she was not doing that she was engrossed in her painting. As the words at her command multiplied and as, one by one, the colours in her painting were filled in, he felt that he was being progressively eased out of her consciousness. She still made cakes, she still brought flowers into the flat, but more and more he got the feeling they were for her, not for them or for him. In reaction he became sullen and unpleasing. He shaved infrequently and dressed defiantly in clothes he knew she disliked. When her absorption in her work kept her from eating he would make himself meals out of tins and sit hunched over the saucepan as he spooned them in. He lost his interest in culinary experiment.

The lapis blue was the last colour to be applied to the painting: the background to the riot of figures she had coloured already. As she laid it on, almost a grain at a time, the whole painting began to alter. Even he could see the change. Up to this point he'd thought the painting rather childish. Colourful and neatly done, it reminded him of the kind of Noah's Ark pictures you find pinned up in nursery schools. But the blue had embalmed the figures in a rich, other-worldly light. Their strange cavortings no longer seemed naive; these dancing figures were going somewhere – to a place he didn't know about. And as he watched her working, so still apart from her gently moving hand, he felt that she too was on her way to this other place whose language he did not know.

She sent the picture to her mother; not framed but carefully rolled in silk to protect it. Once it was gone she became restless and at a loss. She read less and watched television instead, shifting moodily between the channels, never seeing anything through. At other times she turned on the radio and jiggled about to the foolish music. It didn't suit her. She painted her nails. She cooked him meals. She got on his nerves. Sometimes as she sat there, absorbing all the crap that the television gave out, wide-eyed at commercials and games shows alike, he wanted to squash her stupid flat face. And the lips he had thought so wonderful now seemed blowsy and slack. He asked her what she saw in the programmes she watched and she said that they were new to her. She was learning. Why didn't she paint another picture? Yes, she said, she would. But she could not begin the next one straight away. The work on the last had tired her and for the moment she was resting.

Claire Harris

KA'CI

WOMAN OF THE ARAWAK AND THE KARINABU/CARIB
HER SOUND/ING

then the island dreamt in my blood
tina the river swam in my eyes

the soft green hills
the blue world of sky and bara'wa

then this...
ka'ci in a wild dance
no'num flirting
in our skies

wa'cu wak u'kua ku'rapia'u
waya'maka me'cu crayfish woodpigeon singing bird
iguana cat make small make still

dangerous voyages

the way of the world
before such shame we hide our faces
peek between fingers our bodies go their own way

the web trembles

flourish of clouds
moon comes
licks at the sun
who stands
stunned
who flares out
hopeful

there is the held breath there is the heart racing
indecipherable
to catch a ride on vastness

behind our faces
the clicks and cries

this un(ac)countable fraying

i admit

the way of flesh

i would undo nothing

in the patch of field

grass sighs

huts

forest

broken cries of children

kati the moon woman

bites

earth trembles

biriha-ali richa

lightning rears up

darkness covers

kuwi yes! fish hook

a slow blood

hya'mohya-ali

and yes so cold

trees bend sweep at my heart's

air branches claw in my chest

i cling to the house post

i am

uati

uati

there is not

skipping down the mountains

spurt and dr dr dr

ip ip op

a white rain

greasing the leaves the rocks

the beaten earth

wind children dogs

the sudden men stamping the sun into life

with rattles with chac-chacs

with flutes

i join the ululation of women

with wielding

knife and our own blood

we paste & patch the world

flesh of one newly born

our own skin

the crack sealed

the world steadied

or so it seemed where
 deer knelt to our men/manicou fell to the dogs/from teasing
 bowers a surf of cries laughter/fish leapt at nets/the lean
 brown bodies of sons stretched towards always refusing the
 woman's tongue/meanwhile our daughters bloomed/the dry-season
 poui dreamt in our shoulders/in seams and folds of our body
 oil corn water wood/honey poured from combs abandoned to stepped
 branches/once crabs in procession to pots/once a child sang
 to us from the womb and laughed/a roundedness/an expansion
 of bright fruits/our circle dances fluted and leapt from dusk
 to dawn/birds sparkled in the greenish blue air/the kiskadee
 and golden-headed manakin nested together swooped on high excited
 wings with the ochre-bellied fly-catcher/the greenlet popped
 out of the parula/blackbirds tipped their yellow hoods to the
 singing semp/the soft fresh airs the sweet water

/O the joy/the joy/the joy
 first hunger fled then thirst we did as we must we waited
 singing our stories
 surprising the fringes of self

three moons later

winged sails
 from the east
 sibilant bearded men
 butterflies of death

laughing we gathered fruit
 we greeted them welcome

hammers iron flame
 skulls sickness
 sudden out of
 season gestures
 mocking
 savage

iatina suru makuiti i am a mother without a coffin
 i do what mothers do

tu-ki ma-ku-ra'-ue tu-ki ma-ku-ra'-ue
 they make war O lazy one they make war O lazy one

bin-ha-ri ta-nu-ra man-ne-re im-u
 unwilling thou to flee thou my son
 ka-ima bi-ci-ka-ni ka-iwa-ku
 Come, take the lead Come, wake up
 ka-ima bi-ci-ka-ni ka-iwa-ku (sung slowly sadly)
 Come, take the lead Come wake up

and so to coarse cloth to blindfold now here
 and choking i he-re-tic
 i mur-der-er

before their god
 their black robes
 their flames flirting with my hair

what i did not expect the sweet
 of silence

i kariphu'ne carib woman
 glimpse her
 i ka'buru the mixed blood
 tongueless
 finally
 i me'kuru the negro
 wiri

now
 smooth black rich-tongued
 i aim what i am
 i spread like best butter olive oil
 cocoa fat i seep through smooth i aim
 to please like corn coconut palm
 always available

in a lighter version

nunikua
 i self
 through the deep woods
 ara'bsen

of time

nunikua
 i myself
 iwai'yu hurru
 tempest

i aim i

naku my eye naricae my ear
 nuracue my belly nu'ruku
 my genitalia i aim miself i
 tumble through centuries

iatina	i am	i self
	light as air	here home
flesh of my flesh		ma'brika!
which is to say		welcome

....eh eh! it have more in here? but whoso she tink she is?

....SH! mAri! you're very welcome, of course?

....Penelope, is not me, mAri, you shushuing! somebody appoint you chief greeter?

and so many shades!
are you well?

....we don't answer that question i am Marie Lancet, Miz Lancet they call me, and you'll find the space you planned. Welcome, i've got to get back to the child. She know nothing bout caring for child.

I am the Caribbean

I Ka'ci

my body my breath
my sons too their fathers
priests gods woven into you
I bring with me the island
its songs and graces
the unbroken thread of all its knowing
the breath before there was breath

....Ka'ci? is why that vine round our wrist?

....Rie girl, i ent see you so long! i thought you gone.

....mAri, i here to stay, best fix to get along wit me, yes!

....Ka'tsi? have i got that right? stay as long as you like.

....I Ka'ci am not rude or savage am not simple else I would tell you that you are.

Author's Note:

Vocabulary Lists, notes on language and the Arawak song used in the text were kindly sent to me by Ms Anne Lewis, Chief Librarian, National Documentation Centre, Roseau, Dominica, West Indies. My thanks and gratitude.

Words not immediately translated in the text of the poem are:

Ka'ci – the moon; bara'wa – blue water; no'num – the sun

SUSAN BASSNETT

From *Exchanging Lives*

Translating is a form of meeting, it is an encounter between writers. I met Alejandra Pizarnik a few years ago, in Colombia when a friend gave me a pirate edition of some of her poems and it was love at first reading. I never had the chance to meet her in person. She died, tragically young at the age of only 36 in 1972, the year my eldest daughter was born.

Her poetry was completely different to mine. She wrote tiny pieces, prose poems, carefully crafted and full of strange surreal images, with echoes of her Eastern European ancestry and her Latin American present. I was writing poems as solid blocks of words, drawing upon a very Anglo-Saxon realist tradition of writing. She wrote about herself as an abandoned child, a creature in a fairy tale. She was Goldilocks, Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood afraid of the wolf, lost in the wood. I was writing about myself as a mother, as Clytemnestra, as Snow White's stepmother, knocking wolves on the head, putting my apron on to serve wolf stew to my demanding family. She was adrift in unending space. I was trapped in a house without a room of my own.

Her fantasies were of blood and knives. Mine were of secret sexual encounters and having the strength to break through bars with my bare hands. We shared our dreams of violence, just as we shared our sense of homelessness, of not-belonging. She found herself in Argentina, a Latin American with a lost Jewish European past. I found myself in England, an Englishwoman with a lost Mediterranean childhood, an insider and yet an outsider simultaneously, standing on the threshold between cultures: the ideal place for a translator, who occupies the liminal space that others step over without a passing thought.

Alejandra Pizarnik died, like Sylvia Plath, by her own hand, and like Plath she died before she could know much about feminism and solidarity between women. Yet her writing prefigures feminist concerns, and her poems have an immediacy that does not go out of date. She wrote about the dangers and terrors of being the woman she was, and in her way she also celebrated her state.

I started to translate her work because it was a way of getting closer to her, of finding out more about her. Then, I came to see that the act of translating was changing my own writing. I became braver, I tried new forms, experimented with different voices. We were and are, utterly different as writers and as women. She succumbed to the lures of silence, I go on killing wolves and making wolf-skin coats for my increasing family. Maybe, if we had met face to face we would have had nothing in common with one another. But I feel a great sense of closeness to her. I know her. She knows me. We have shared something. Through translation.

Susan Bassnett & Alejandra Pizarnik

In the following extracts each set of three poems consists of a poem by Susan Bassnett, a poem by Alejandra Pizarnik and an English translation of that poem by Susan Bassnett

GOD'S CHANDELIER

The chandelier of heaven once came loose.
I did not know, until I saw its chain
swinging in vicious freedom and looked up
to where the vaulted sky clanged open, shut
belling in each wind's sway. Nothing to do
with me, of course. Let someone else repair it,
some strong saint armed with his pliers
and a trusty nail. God can keep chaos out
and fix his own dome's breaking heart.
I'll even give him lessons if he likes
on how to keep his house in order. If, in turn
he'll tell me when the fractured crystal sphere
is set to fall and wipe me out of time.

SIGNOS

Todo hace el amor con el silencio

Mi habían prometido un silencio
como un fuego, una casa de silencio.
De pronto el templo es un circo y
La luz un tambor

El infierno musical (1971)

SIGNS

Everything makes love with silence.

They promised me a silence
like fire, a house of silence.
Suddenly the temple is a circus
the light a drum

GOETHE'S DESK

I once saw Goethe's desk, in Goethe's house,
a lovely piece, warm wood on which to write,
while on a floor below a dozen servants
tiptoed their way to make his tea and keep
his carriage at the ready. Outside the casement
gardeners trimmed his plants. The world of Weimar
begged for his company and he tried hard to learn
all that there was to know and write it down.

If I'd had Goethe's desk I might have spent
a lifetime writing Faust. Instead I do
a dozen servants' jobs and write my lines
stealing the time from home. My desk's the kitchen table.
No clavichord nearby. The washer's thrum
would drown it anyhow. I learn the hard way.
Washing the muddy footprints off the floor
I rinse the hopes of grandeur out of me.

FIESTA

He desplegado mi orfandad
sobre la mesa, como una mapa.
Dibujé el itinerario
hacia mi lugar al viento.
Los que llegan no me encuentran.
Los que espero no existen.

Y he bebido licores furiosos
para transmutar los rostros
en un angel, en vasos vacíos.

Los trabajos y las noches (1965)

FIESTA

I unfurled my homelessness
across the table, like a map.
I traced my journey as far
as my place in the wind.
The ones who get there never meet me.
The ones I wait for don't exist.

And I drank wild spirits
to change faces into
angels, into empty cups.

SARGASSO SEA

They say that if you sail for days on end
and follow currents in the ocean's skin
you reach a place where water drowns in plants,
a jungle of entwined pads of leaf,
seaweed snakes that slow the waves to slime.
Once in that place, who knows what tendrilled things
could curl around a helpless wooden boat.
Perhaps the hulks of ships still rock
the skeletal remains of men who tried
to cut a pathway through the hungry vines
to get back to the sea. When I was trapped
in the Sargasso Sea of our own bed,
I clawed my way back from the curling fronds
and raised a ragged sail. Now, out of sight of land
the boat is moving well, the wind behind.
But, just in case, I keep the oars on board
because that wind is fickle. If I drift back
I'll row against the tide and save myself
using the oar to break your clutching hands.

NOMBRARTE

No el poema de tu ausencia,
sólo un dibujo, una grieta en un muro,
algo en el viento, un sabor amargo.

Los trabajos y las noches (1965)

SPEAKING YOUR NAME

Not a poem on your absence
just a sketch, a crack in a wall,
something in the wind
a taste of bitterness

STRAW ON MY DESK

Straw on my desk, flutters below the eaves
tell me a bird has built her careful nest
inside my good brick walls. The fledglings cheep;
I dare not type in case the keys disturb
her new-hatched family brood. There is no room
for me at my own table, mothering
wings hold back my writing hand. I must share
my spaces, cannot have ground of my own.
She chose her place with care, took straw and twig,
dry grass to line the nest, the warmth of brick,
defense against the world. The last outpost
my desk, has fallen not to savage cries,
but to the force that binds us mothers both,
nourishing of our young. But she can fly,
between the feeds she soars. The straw she leaves
a trophy of her triumph, while I stay
earthbound and silent, home-made prisoner.

TU VOZ

Emboscado en mi escritura
cantas en mi poema.
Rehén de tu dulce voz
petrificada en mi memoria.
Pájaro asido a su fuga.
Aire tatuado por un ausente.
Reloj que late conmigo
para que nunca despierte.

El infierno musical (1971)

YOUR VOICE

Hidden in my writing
you sing in my poem
Your sweet voice a hostage
turned in my memory to stone.
A bird snatched in its flight
Air stained by absence
A watch that ticks with me
to keep away despair

GABRIELLE WATLING

Hybridity as Agency for the Post-colonial Migrant: Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days*

While there is clearly some measure of truth in Simon During's contention that theories of post-colonial hybridity are Western academic inventions which often serve to limit the celebration of indigenous cultures,¹ the hybridity produced by Third World migration to the West nevertheless demands responses which can read and theorize the various negotiations between migrant and host. Whereas the 'first wave' of post-colonial migration led chiefly to Britain and to such bleak allegorical accounts of the barriers to communication between migrant and host in times of social, political and demographic change as Janet Frame's *The Edge of the Alphabet* (1962) and V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), subsequent narratives on the topic have been less pessimistic. Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989)² and Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1991)³ emerged after that first migratory phase, to tell of migration to the United States, and seem more readily able to concentrate on questions of *individual* subjectivity in a post-colonial context. Each text obviously owes something to its author's experiences as a post-colonial migrant, and each has its own implicitly recommended strategies for how to go about occupying Western space, how to negotiate the cultural differences separating the self from the host nation. Thus they bear witness to a development in the conceptualization of the subjectivity of the post-colonial migrant, from anonymous 'agent' to autonomous, multicultural 'citizen', and, in their efforts to negotiate First World difference, they engage with the question of hybridity.

Even so, neither of these texts unequivocally endorses hybridity as a mode of agency for Third World peoples in the First World. Mukherjee, the less enthusiastic of the two, suggests that it produces partial (and therefore marginal) citizens, and recommends total commitment to the new host culture; Suleri is prepared to allow that it can be useful in the struggle to undo the knowledge/power nexus which produces social, cultural, sexual and gendered 'others' in both Third World and First Worlds, but her own eventual position, or positions, are much more

pluralized and subtle than the single term 'hybridity' can cover. *Jasmine*, Mukherjee's most noted work of fiction, condemns hybridity as 'fence-sitting' and endorses its heroine's embrace of all things American; *Meatless Days* maintains that we all situated in a number of discourses, and that identity is 'located precisely where you're sitting' (p.20), but Suleri acknowledges that to claim subjectivity is to exceed discourse. Whereas Jasmine makes every effort to erase her Indian identity and to close on the achievement of a new Western one (the realization of the *dream* of the hybrid subject), the narrator in *Meatless Days* eschews closure in favour of an intellectual and experiential inquisitiveness which accepts change and encourages boundary crossing at every juncture. For Suleri, hybridity is a state which, despite its permanence, is not definable. Thus her hybridity suggests a paradoxically permanent impermanence which allows the migrant to 'walk with tact on other people's land' (p. 164). This paper argues for Suleri's commitment to negotiation between cultures, as against Mukherjee's commitment to cultural reinscription.

Relocation within a First World community substantially alters the post-colonial subject's experience of cultural hybridity. By definition, the post-colonial migrant is a subject who interpellates and is interpellated by a broad range of discourses, not all of which co-exist unproblematically, but Western humanist expectations require that the subject consolidate his or her identity into the autonomous, unambiguous 'I' of the humanist tradition. Hybridity thus becomes shorthand for 'assimilation', a fixation of the self which requires that the migrant weed out the ambiguities born of her engagement with multiple discourses and recreate herself as 'one of us'. To put that another way, the post-colonial migrant is expected to take on Western individuality and so become a 'readable' member of the First World community. Most migrants oscillate between their cultural base and the dominant First World culture, but Mukherjee's Jasmine increasingly regards the movement back and forth between her Indian friends, family and culture and her adopted America as a sign of failure. Jasmine's early efforts to negotiate America are typical of the difficulties faced by Third World migrants in the First World, but, in adopting American values on behalf of Third World migrants, Mukherjee's work systematically overlooks the very forces which help to relegate the Asian migrant to second-class status. In short, Mukherjee's Jasmine goes beyond the adaptation which would allow her to renegotiate America on her terms and becomes a Western humanist 'I', a self-asserting individual for whom the voluntary negotiation of multiple discourses is anathema.

A Punjabi village girl, Jasmine replays the American Dream. She arrives with nothing and is soon the victim of the corruption of decadent America, but her misadventure only inspires her to investigate the 'Land of Opportunity'. Perhaps ironically, she is brought to America and inducted into its *laissez faire* opportunism through a signally Indian plot device, in that she has left her home country to come to the body of her

murdered husband, whose dream it had been to study at an American college, and there commit ritual suicide. But on the way, in Florida, the disfigured sea captain who smuggles her ashore brutally rapes her in a seedy motel. Jasmine manages to kill him, following which she 'murders' her Punjabi self, burning her widow's robes and her husband's suit in a dumpster outside the fatal motel. Having thus endured 24 hours in the U.S. of A., Jasmine walks on as a disciple of Kali: not a widow, not a victim, and, increasingly, not an Indian.

Mukherjee has called Jasmine 'a very real feminist' who leaves behind 'a world of despair', and has observed that the sort of 'gumption' and/or 'hustlerism' she learns to show in the States evokes the image which Americans traditionally have of themselves.⁴ Thus, Mukherjee suggests, Jasmine is less an Indian girl who makes it in America (as an Indian) than an Indian girl who *becomes* American. She does not make it despite her Indianness; within days of her arrival she trades that Indianness for American walk and talk. Despite the individualist implications of her 'feminist hustlerism', however, Jasmine in fact depends on several other people for survival and success. Her first American benefactor, Lillian Gordon, teaches her to 'walk American', an experiment which works too well, suggesting how eager the text is that Jasmine should become 'more American than the Americans':

Walk American, [Lillian] exhorted me, and showed me how. I worked hard on the walk and deportment. Within a week she said I'd lost my shy sidle. She said I walked like one of those Trinidad Indian girls, all thrust and cheekiness. She meant it as a compliment.

'Tone it down girl!' She clapped as I took a turn between the kitchen and bath. I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at the transformation. Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes. I couldn't tell if with the Hasnapuri sidle I'd also abandoned my Hasnapuri modesty. (pp. 132-3)

Although the text occasionally slows down enough for Jasmine to spread a little token Indianness amongst her benefactors, the smell of 'cumin, coriander and turmeric' (p. 215) does not linger long enough to make any impression. In fact, in the company of other Indians, Jasmine mainly feels vulnerable and humiliated. She is taken in by her husband's Indian mentor, Professor Vadhera, but once inside his Queens apartment, which she describes as full of 'artificially maintained Indianness', she wants to 'distance [her]self from everything Indian' (p. 145). Mukherjee equates India with 'the Old World', 'where your opportunities are closed by caste, gender, or family', and sees America as a land without such barriers, a country where migrants can 'make their futures in ways they could not have done in the Old World'. It is 'more real ... than India'.⁵

But the America which Jasmine actually encounters has lost some of its legendary New World assertiveness. In Florida, New York, and Iowa she is obstructed by corruption, complacency and conservatism (but not by

racism; this successfully interpellated neoAmerican competitor does not struggle against 'Other' Americans, but against other Americans). Sometimes she profits from American cynicism – it gets her into the country and procures for her a greencard without the requisite documentation; sometimes cheating the system works against her – an illegal immigrant, she has no legal recourse when she is raped, and the scam which got her into America also admits her husband's murderer.

Having escaped Old World India, Jasmine takes on Old World America. Taking advantage of its corruption when she can, she sets about showing it the error of its ways. The conservative Old and the dynamic New American worlds come together in Iowa, where Jasmine flees when she learns that her husband's killer has arrived in New York and has her in his sights. In Iowa she meets Bud, who in rapid succession becomes her boss, her lover and her *de facto* husband, and together they adopt a 14-year-old Vietnamese refugee called Du, another New American. Iowa, the heart of rural America, is in the grip of recession, and farmers who formerly epitomized America's spirit of enterprise and hard work are having difficulty even holding onto their land. One such is Darrel, a man caught between the Old World and the New, the worlds respectively of Bud and Jasmine. As the text's representative of the land-based American traditions and as Darrel's bank manager, Bud tries to dissuade him from selling his farm to a golf course development on the grounds that to do so would betray his family's past, their hard work and successes. But Jasmine approaches the situation differently:

I see [this] way of life coming to an end. Baseball loyalties, farming, small-town innocence. Most people in Elsa County care only about the Hawkeyes – football or basketball. In the brave new world of Elsa County, Karin Ripplemeyer runs a suicide hot line. Bud Ripplemeyer has adopted a Vietnamese and shackled up with a Punjabi girl. There's a Vietnamese network. There are Hmong, with a church of their own, turning out quilts for Lutheran relief. (p. 229)

This New America is peopled by migrants like Du, a 'new tycoon' (p. 226). Darrel wants the kind of life he imagines these New Americans lead, but he is eventually crushed by guilt for abandoning the Old. *Jasmine*, however, endorses the abandonment of the Old, and so Darrel's suicide becomes little more than an object lesson in the dangers of trying to leap across ideological boundaries. Hybridity, in this scenario, is definitely not an empowering influence.

Carmen Wickramagamage regards Jasmine's rites of passage as 'a [release] from her confinement ... [which leaves] her free to savour and experience the "fluidity of American character and the American landscape"', and contends that she is motivated by the knowledge that 'no human attachment to community, place, or culture is so final or sacred that it cannot be broken'.⁶ Certainly, Jasmine's break with her culture is to

be seen to be complete. The story concludes with Jasmine deciding to leave Bud, the father of her unborn child, and to join Taylor, her New York employer and next lover, and his daughter, Duff, in California. This is the New American family:

I wait for Taylor's crooked-toothed grin, but his teeth don't look so crooked anymore. The smile says, *Why not?*

'We'll be an unorthodox family, Jase' ...

'Don't pack,' he says. 'This is the age of plastic.' (p. 238)

Jasmine justifies her decision to leave Iowa and Bud by explaining that she 'is not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and [my] old-world dutifulness' (p. 240). Having chosen promise over duty, Jasmine is 'out the door ... scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hope' (p. 241), and, she might add, off to the epicentre of the American dreamscape, California.

Jasmine occupies 'The American Dream' more successfully than most Americans because she has embraced the strategies they have neglected. As C.L. Chua observes, 'when Jasmine moves westward to a greater freedom and self-actualisation, she is merely acting in the time-honoured American tradition of lighting out for the territory ahead, a territory hallowed by Horace Greeley and Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*'.⁷ And like a character out of Wild West folklore, this 'grabby and greedy' immigrant⁸ murders, hustles, cajoles, demands, uses and deserts her way to California. As Mukherjee comments:

I think that to some extent my characters, including Jasmine, are very often tough and they are survivors and they are hustlers, 'wheelers and dealers' ... and that's part of being a pioneer. I think a lot of people have forgotten that the first white settlers must have had to be tough in order to wrest the country from someone else, stake out the territory.⁹

Thus Mukherjee locates Jasmine within America's pioneer tradition, the myth of 'Yankee know-how'. But her description overlooks the fact that white America's success was achieved through the massacre and dispossession of America's native races, its own 'Indians'. Jasmine has become so equated with America as the land of 'opportunity' that she shares in the ethos not only of its 'pioneers', but also of the acts of violence on which the American dream was founded. Jasmine's staking out of her territory, then, goes beyond a mere migrant success story. It comes to share in the brutal colonial tradition of which she was once a victim. In the beginning Mukherjee's novel immerses its central character in the prejudices, exploitation and violence of migration – but it allows her to overcome these difficulties by internalizing the very tactics used against her.

As Anne Brewster has observed, Jasmine is positioned neither 'on the margin of contemporary American culture' nor in opposition to it; rather,

'as an exemplar of a hegemonic nationalism', she 'represent[s] the voice of "the new America"'.¹⁰ Without contending for a moment that Third World migration necessarily demands that the migrant occupy a 'migrant state' on society's margins or in opposition to the 'mainstream', I agree with Brewster that *Jasmine* enunciates an American 'neo-nationalism'. The novel sees hybridity as a half-way state, and eschews it as such; for Mukherjee, to choose hybridity is to choose expatriatism over full citizenship, and so in *Jasmine* the hybrid, fluid self loses out to the autonomous self of 'citizenship' in a nation where 'opportunity' relies on an individual's ability to 'wrest the country from someone else, [and] stake out the territory'.¹¹

If *Jasmine* eagerly embraces the subject position of the autonomous and rapacious 'New American', *Meatless Days*, by contrast, both recognizes through the negotiation of various discourses – native, migratory, gendered and familial – that interpellation is for the migrant an ongoing process, and examines the value of occupying the fluid spaces hybridity can offer. The post-colonial woman's autobiography Suleri produces is a consciously fractured narrative which emphasizes the processive *layering* of self-construction over some notional *consolidation* of self. That said, it should be stressed that Suleri's text offers no simple endorsement of (something which is typically understood as) 'hybridity'. Instead, as Linda Warley observes, it works towards 'a contestatory, politically conscious subject position',¹² and we find that, in practice, Suleri both *articulates* native agency, for example, as a juggler of discourses (Urdu poetry alongside Milton, Shakespeare and Kipling), and *abdicates* agency when events, such as the deaths of her mother and her sister or problems like her relationship with Tom, 'seem to evade explanation altogether, somehow exceeding whatever claims to knowledge and understanding the autobiographer might wish to make'.¹³ *Meatless Days* has an agenda, one which might even be described as an attempt positively to articulate 'hybridity'; but, as its structure and style indicate, 'hybridity' is not a position to be occupied or rejected wilfully by a migrant speaker.

Meatless Days takes the form of a collection of interwoven stories which are themselves fragmented. The stories, of family members and friends, are told not as unified, closed narratives but are stitched together as parts of an embroidery never to be completed. The stories intersect, engage with, and inform each other, with no one voice allowed to dominate the book's delicate balance, and, despite Suleri's device of naming chapters after individual people – 'Muskatori, My Friend', 'Goodbye to the Greatness of Tom', 'Papa and Pakistan', the eponymous characters do not dominate their chapters. 'Goodbye to the Greatness of Tom', for example, is less about Tom than it is about the idea of Pakistan becoming a political and social reality.

But neither is Suleri's project to assemble some (post-colonial) 'reality' from a group of personal anecdotes: conscious that her words may be

used to represent some sort of post-colonial 'truth', as in the past they have been, she remarks to her brother that she 'has lived many years as an otherness machine' (p. 105). Despite the similarities between the experiences of the Suleri family and Pakistan's own social and political development, Sangeeta Ray's observation is accurate: the text's 'anecdotal familial genealogy ... breaks down the master narratives of historical facticity by revealing its dependency on the fractured memories of its individual participants'.¹⁴ Frequently, the 'facticity' of history is challenged either by Suleri's own analysis or by the inability of human memory 'truthfully' to retain facts. For example, Suleri's grandmother Dadi, whose very spine has frozen into the shape of a question mark, can neither remember how many sisters she had nor which country her son has emigrated to, Switzerland or Swaziland; and Suleri's memory of witnessing her sister's childhood accident becomes blurred when Ifat herself retells the story many years later 'as if [Sara] had not been there' (p. 135). None of the participants 'owns' his or her story; every time a story is retold, events and their witnesses have to be viewed 'from, as it were, the opposite angle of the room' (p. 135). And, like history, language too is flexible. Suleri's mother tells her that she began very early to talk and become 'interested in sentences' (p. 155), but, as Sara points out, her interest in grammar,

caused a single slippage in my nouns: I would call a marmalade a squirrel and I'd call a squirrel a marmalade. Today I can understand the impulse and would very much like to call sugar an opossum; an antelope, tea. To be engulfed by grammar after all is a tricky prospect, and a voice deserves to declare its own control in any way it can, asserting that in the end it is an inventive thing. (p. 155)

Meatless Days celebrates the speaking space it opens up. Its project is both political and personal: political in that it directs the reader towards a radically decentred form of comprehension, and personal in that the speaker refuses to draw conclusions about their experiences on behalf of the subjects of its many anecdotes, insisting that what they 'know' is not knowable by anybody else. Thus Suleri's Welsh mother Mair, a major influence on her life, can frequently disappear from view when she 'retreat[s] ... away from us and into her own childhood, back to some Welsh moment that served to succour her when duty felt too great' (p. 161).

Deeply though she respects her family's and friends' private 'retreats', Suleri quite deliberately sets out to disrupt any inference of 'knowability' her anecdotes may threaten to convey. Pakistan's political and social development may be closely associated with the development of the Suleri family, but by the end of *Meatless Days* neither can with any certainty be 'known'. Suleris live all over the globe, and, despite their common Pakistani connection, they occupy many diverse social and national

discourses which will not be drawn into some closed explanation of their lives. And Pakistan similarly resists totalization: it will not serve as a metonym of the 'Third World', a term Suleri ironically employs throughout the text, as it is delivered to the reader in pieces which, like Dadi's burned skin, cannot be made to congeal.

Moreover, although Pakistan acts as a geographical focus for Suleri's stories, most of the apparently 'Pakistani' experiences can themselves be considered migrant ones. Not one of the central characters is 'properly' Pakistani: grandmother Dadi was born near Delhi and only moved to the Punjab after Partition (for all her devotion to Islam, Dadi 'was not amongst those who, on the fourteenth of August, unfurled flags' (p. 2) for the birth of the Islamic nation); father Pip was in London campaigning for the creation of Pakistan when the nation was constituted; older sister Ifat and younger brother Irfan were born in England, and, although Sara herself was born in Pakistan, her mother is Welsh. The family continue to divide their time between Pakistan and England and, with the exception of Pip, none of them really adopts either country as 'home' – or any of the many other countries their professions, marriages or travels take them to. Whether they are in Pakistan, Kuwait, England, or America, Suleri's adapt, and locate 'home' in memories and anecdotes. Suleri's point, I think, is that living in Pakistan is much the same as living in any other incomprehensible country. Pakistan, a nation which sprang fully-formed from the heads of expatriate Indian intellectuals in Britain, can be known no more than can Kuwait, the United States or Britain. And Pakistan's occupants, like those of Kuwait, the United States or Britain, are hybridized in the very act of occupying their nationality. One can be – perhaps one is – hybridized wherever one is 'sitting'.

The women in *Meatless Days* are metonyms of the diasporic experiences presented in the book. Suleri, her sisters, her friend Muskatori, and her mother, all confront life 'elsewhere', as wives, students and/or professionals. But as Ifat points out, women live in bodies – unlike men, who live in 'homes' (p. 143). 'Home' and 'nation' – masculinist concepts – imply ownership and patriarchal protection, fragile though the notion may be; the women's lives have no such grounding. Mair's experience becomes a dominant theme in Suleri's treatment of migrant flexibility, crystallized perhaps in her refrain, 'Child, I will not grip' (p. 164). Renamed 'Surraya Suleri' when she married Sara's father Zia, Mair 'will not grip' to her Welshness, but neither will she 'grip' to her applied Pakistani nationality. Instead,

[she] had to walk through her new context in the shape of memory erased ... She learned to live apart, then – apart from herself even – growing into that curiously powerful disinterest in owning, in belonging ... She let commitment and belonging become my father's domain, learning instead the way of walking with tact on other people's land. (p. 164)

Mair refuses to locate her consciousness in one place, and resists those taxonomies which work to regulate social position and behaviour, particularly women's behaviour, in cultural systems. Her daughters remark that

Her logic was indeed a secret. 'The only trouble with being female in Pakistan,' Ifat complained ... 'is that it allows for two possible modes of behaviour – either you can be sweet and simple, or you can be cold and proud.' 'No wonder they found Mamma difficult to decipher, then,' I agreed, 'whose coldness was so sweet ...' 'As tactful as ice in water,' Ifat added passionately, 'and as sweet!' (p. 166)

Suleri observes that Mair is 'a guest in her own name' (p. 163). She refuses to follow either her husband into his obsession with Pakistani politics, or her children on their 'Asiatic ... walk[s] throughout the world' (pp. 160-1). As a Welshwoman in Pakistan, Mair opens a space for herself which allows for *dialogue* with her adopted country but at the same time reserves a corner for her Welsh memories. Suspended somewhere between Pakistan's rules and Britain's, Mair's 'intimacy with place and way grew habitual ... but [she] never changed her habit of seeming to announce, "It is good of you to let me live – in my own way – among you"' (p. 165). Occasionally, as already noted, Mair retreats 'to some Welsh moment', but she spends most of her time moving 'through Pakistan with a curious relaxation ... [becoming] to that community a creature of unique and unclassifiable discourse' (pp. 165-6). Certainly she never disappears into that quasi-spiritual ineffability within which the West often contains the 'East'. Her situation differs from, and in some ways inverts, her daughter's, in that Mair is a white woman in a Third World country and Sara is a brown woman writing from the West's most powerful nation – but her principal lesson to Sara, that one must '[walk] with tact on other people's land' (p. 164), presents both a possible strategy and an ethic for the migrant subject seeking agency in an other place.

As I hope this account has suggested, Sara's own experiences as a migrant in the United States do not dominate *Meatless Days*. The book emphasizes the need for flexibility 'wherever one is sitting', and makes no special case for Sara's American life. At the same time, as Linda Warley points out, '*Meatless Days* ... reminds us that a general theory can never be made to fit all peoples or all texts and, indeed, demonstrates what Trinh T. Minh-ha has noted ... categories always leak'.¹⁵ The book begins with a paradox that demonstrates just such a 'leakage', when Suleri says that 'leaving Pakistan was, of course, tantamount to giving up the company of women' (p. 1). But she immediately goes on to say that she could only reveal this to her American women friends. In Pakistan, she claims, 'the concept of woman was not really part of an available vocabulary: we were too busy for that, just living, and conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a sister or a child or a wife or a

mother or a servant' (p. 1). But she also says that her friend Dale, an American woman who lives in Boston, 'will one day write a book about the stern and secretive life of breast-feeding' (p. 1). The concept of 'woman' may not yet be available in the Pakistani vocabulary – which perhaps explains her otherwise baffling claim that 'there are no women in the third world' (p. 20) – but women's business, including breast-feeding, can be as 'stern and secretive' for Americans as it is for Pakistanis. Of course, the Pakistani sense of what a woman is and may do differs greatly from the American view – Suleri's conversations with her circle of women in Pakistan differ greatly from her exchanges with Anita and Dale in the U.S. – but then Suleri's concept of herself as woman changes too. Like Mair, Sara knows that her 'ambidextrous eyes' (p. 92) will allow her to enter both worlds – the strong, vibrant and fascinating domestic world of her Pakistani sisters and the world of serious public intellectual endeavour at Yale – without having either to mount a campaign to unify the two or to abandon one of them.

From her specific social and economic situation, Suleri points out that migrant experiences will always require negotiation between cultural paradigms. For her, migration is an elliptical and open-ended process which will not be reduced to a formula. Thus the view which emerges from *Meatless Days* refutes the eager adoption of American entrepreneurship and the rejection of all negotiation, that we found in *Jasmine*. Jasmine takes little more than a week to re-invent herself as American, but her unlikely trail leaves no gates open for anyone to follow her. Her only allegiance is to herself as a self-actualizing individual; she shows none to any community of immigrants. Suleri, by contrast, cannot conceive of life, either in Pakistan or in America, without a community. Having said that leaving Pakistan was tantamount to giving up the company of women, she devotes the bulk of her book to recording and commemorating the network of women she has built up throughout her life, regardless of where she might have been 'sitting' at the time. She recognizes that the particular circumstances of her own migration will not stand for all migrant experiences but also that, for all migrants, migration is an on-going process which demands that the migrant confronts both her association with and her disconnection from the several communities in which she lives.

Taken together, these books offer two clearly divergent potential responses to post-colonial migrant subjectivity. Does the post-colonial migrant take her home with her when she travels? Is she encouraged to share, and receive, cultural experiences when she arrives? Or is it best for the migrant to disavow cultural background and adopt the customs of the new country? It could be claimed that, in adopting the last of these positions, Bharati Mukherjee sketches a means whereby the post-colonial migrant might find a form of personal empowerment but, as she is more interested in borrowing the master's tools than in dismantling the master's

house, her book ultimately offers no feasible general strategy for post-colonial migrants in the First World. Perhaps the telling irony is that Jasmine goes to America intending to kill herself as a good Indian wife; and ultimately, in making herself entirely into a new American woman, that is what she does. Suleri, on the other hand, keeps alive her ties to 'home', which she suggests may remain a sustaining and strengthening notion – albeit mobile and indistinct – for post-colonial migrants. And while Suleri's particular flexibility perhaps reflects her position of social and professional privilege, her ability both to retain her heritage and adapt to a new culture has allowed her productively *and* creatively to link worlds without having to choose between them, without having to kill off a substantial part of who she is.

NOTES

1. Simon During, 'Postcolonialism and Globalisation', *Meanjin*, 51, 2, Winter 1992, pp. 339-53.
2. Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
3. Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
4. Runar Vignisson, 'Bharati Mukherjee: An Interview', *SPAN*, 34/35, October 1992/May 1993, pp. 163, 168.
5. Anne Brewster, 'A Critique of Bharati Mukherjee's Neo-Nationalism', *SPAN*, 34/35, October 1992/May 1993, p. 54.
6. Carmen Wickramagamage, 'Relocation as a Positive Act: The Immigration Experience in Bharati Mukherjee's Novels', *Diaspora*, 2, 2, 1992, p. 193.
7. C.L. Chua, 'Passages from India: Migrating to America in the Fiction of V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee', in *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, ed. E. Nelson (Westport: Greenwood, 1992), p. 59.
8. Mukherjee, in Brewster, p. 54.
9. Vignisson, p. 160.
10. op. cit., p. 50.
11. Vignisson, p. 160.
12. Linda Warley, 'Assembling Ingredients: Subjectivity in *Meatless Days*', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 7, 1, Spring 1992, p. 112.
13. *ibid.*, p. 115.
14. Sangeeta Ray, 'Memory, Identity, Patriarchy: Projecting a Past in the Memoirs of Sara Suleri and Michael Ondaatje', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 39, 1, Winter 1993, p. 52.
15. Warley, p. 121.

Ian Duhig

THE CAT AND BANJO

He lit his cigar with the last crested telegram,
drifting blue ash over the stinkwood davenport.
The sundry debtors-ledger curled like the brim
of a smasher hat. 'If was the master.
Played the cat and banjo with my heart.
Words can't ... bad as Majuba.' Now Doornkop
was teaching his codebooks to speak Dutch.
Table Mountain boomed across the stoep.
He snapped his glass from the poet's sketch *
of some raiding ape neck-deep in esparto,
its great head framed by whiskey-cusps,
its very species a smudged graffito.

* the poet was Kipling. This is based on an incident when he visited Rhodes after the failure of the Jameson Raid

FUNDAMENTALS

Brethren, I know that many of you have come here today because your Chief has promised any non-attender that he will stake him out, drive tent-pegs through his anus and sell his wives and children to the Portuguese. As far as possible, I want you to put that from your minds. Today, I want to talk to you about the Christian God.

In many respects, our Christian God is not like your God. His name, for example, is not also our word for rain. Neither does it have for us the connotation 'sexual intercourse'. And although I call Him 'holy' (we call Him 'Him', not 'It', even though we know He is not a man and certainly not a woman) I do not mean, as you do, that He is fat like a healthy cow.

Let me make this clear. When I say 'God is good, God is everywhere', it is not because He is exceptionally fat. 'God loves you' does not mean what warriors do to spear-carriers on campaign. It means He feels for you like your mother or your father – yes I know Chuma loved a son he bought like warriors love spear-carriers on campaign – that's *Sin* and it comes later.

From today, I want you to remember just three simple things: our God is different from your God, our God is better than your God and my wife doesn't like it when you watch her go to the toilet. Grasp them and you have grasped the fundamentals of salvation. Baptisms start at sundown but before then, as arranged, how to strip, clean and re-sight a breech-loading Martini-Henry.

ARMOURIES

The logo of the Royal Armouries Museum is that great helmet made by Konrad Seusenhofer, commissioned as an image of and to protect the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, a gift with more edge than the collection of janissary scimitars.

I scrutinize the original for its rumoured hint of clap.
The cuckold's horns it gave him would stagger an elk.
A worm of gold snot threatens a castellated silver rictus
beneath an iron maiden version of James Joyce's spectacles.

I start to lecture the children about Uncle Toby Shandy
who studied war yet couldn't hurt a fly, but when I look
they're glued to the display case of battlefield laser rifles.
I wipe my glasses. The hint must be the spectacles themselves.

MERCHANTS OF SILENCE

So money could talk, the polyglot Silk Road
would trade even its insults wordlessly;
an index finger tapping the forehead

will lose its touch in any translation:
'You envy the silkworm its privacy'?
A strict definition's inadequate.

You might try by looking up 'idiot'
in a dealer's uncut first edition
of Dr Johnson's English Dictionary.

TALKING GOD

Ironically 'patriotism' is one of the few English words for which the Navajo language does not have an equivalent. N. AASENG 'Navajo Code Talkers'

- Let me hear my title.
- *Talking God, Drinker of Brimstone.*
- My full title.
- *Also Battalion Intelligence Officer, the 2nd Battalion the 5th Marines.*
- My languages.
- *Foul and Court Navajo.*
- My Clans.
- *The Hunger People, The Salt People, The Bitter Water People and the 297th Marine Platoon who couldn't choose a name in time.*
- I declare them The Dumbfuck People.
- *Hail The Dumbfuck People!*
- We are all The People. Who only do we fear?
- *Dogface GIs imagining we're Japanese.*
- What of the Dogfaces who ordered our ancestors into a land where nothing grew but shadows, to share insects and weave bird-traps from each other's hair, to lose the robe of dawn, the robe of blue sky, the robe of yellow evening light and the robe of darkness?
- *Shit happens.*
- Our fathers were whipped for speaking Navajo in their schools; now Dogfaces beg the very words from out of our mouths.
- *We are The People.*
- We are The People thrown on swords of turquoise to the South, on Northern black-rock knives, white-shell razors to the East; explain the West.
- *Earshell. Japanese word-frequency analysts monitoring our broadcasts.*
- When lakes are stars and rivers lightning.
- *High-altitude reconnaissance.*
- The Binaye Ahani Who Slay With Their Eyes.
- *Anti-aircraft batteries.*
- 'Chat'.
- *'Frog': amphibious assault.*
- A barren bird.
- *A dry run.*
- Tomorrow all the birds will lay, furnishing plumes for which ritual?
- *The Enemy Way.*
- Translate 'Iwo Jima'.
- *'Brimstone Island'.*
- Till we set our feet in pollen.
- *Till we set our feet in pollen.*

Landeg White

POETRY OF VERANDAS

(for Helen and Hélio Alves)

1.

Here's evening, pinesmoke
with shafts of gold,
the sheer well-being
of a mosquito bite.

On the third floor up we are
up among birds, not
the caged canaries but
martins veering so
tight I could grab them
like Jehengir Khan who caught
the swallow at Lords.

In the haze, a pigeon
stutters by, anxious
and out of his depth.

Come, poetry,
smoulder, lascivious
as charcoal, target
the ear like senhor mosquito,

zoom like the martin's
shadow, skimming
tessellated pavements, leaping
houses, somer-
saulting, can
turn on an *escudo*,
is most feigning
in its scything graphite
when closest to matching
the uncatchable.

2.

For Luís Vaz de Camões, then, how was it
quarantined just down there off Cascais
all-but-home after seventeen Christmases
the plague raging, Lisbon a necropolis,

how did he feel the colonial voyager
with his vision of Portugal, his *octavo*
epic sundried and nurtured through
mutilation, fevers and shipwreck

in the bag? Was the court corrupter
than he recalled, the clergy more ignorant,
the boy king distinctly odd? Had he
second thoughts about the Moor?

And was his stop-press dedication impassioned
or politic? *Sebastian, my King, Guarantor
of our Ancient Liberties, born to extend
the Empire of the Faith ...* (a case of poetry

making something happen? Disaster!)

3.

Summer long
on all the beaches, children
sculpture in sand
the Discoveries:

anchors, caravels,
Henry the Navigator,
Adamastor
of the Cape of Storms.

Summer long
on all the beaches, the sea
salt with tears of Portugal
swills them away.

4.

I'm still wondering about Camões, having
 myself (to compare great things with small)
 been seduced overseas by visions of home
 as a place where matters were better organized

and returned to the grim reality. Thatcher
 was not unlike Sebastian, and the Falklands
 turned on a coin. Now we are hoist
 with myths of greatness betrayed, and I recall

the honourable old man at Belém cursing, as
 the caravels waited, *this lust for gold,*
this ambition to be lords of India, Persia,
Arabia and Ethiopia, this cruel ferocity

with its philosophy of death. Camões
 invented him and gave him eloquence, but
 the north wind swelled the sails (as it did)
 and nothing could undo the vast event

(which the poet, as true historian, marvelled at).

5

Pessoa wrote
 in restaurants, alone
 with his heteronyms
 clamorous disquiet.

His bronze, in his beloved
 Chiado, loiters
 at a pavement table,
 dipping its fountain pen in wine
 as the estuary drifts south.

(I've tried this in England:
 people think I'm a policeman.)

6

And here he's again, the Father
of Winds. Our matted pines
heave like an ocean, the almond trees

fuss prettily, ancient olives
munch and fumble, blue gums
bunch their shadow-boxing fists,

while up on the skyline, royal palms
semaphore with their ostrich feathers
to clouds scudding like clippers

on the Azores run. The Atlantic's
in every blast, and how
the swallows pinion it, cruising

under our block's cliff, accelerating
in the domestic air, hitting
the corner, and

FLAWEWEWEWE they are puffballs, ounces
of cartilage, sheer as silk to spattering
on the tessellated pavements,

feathering at the last split-
second in a teetering
pole-vault, swooping, skimming

the perfected charcoal of their shadows.
I watch them
trying on wings. I watch them

readying for the dangerous currents south.

BACALHAU

1.

Another restaurant in Alcabideche! People keep asking, *where's the new restaurant?* and Alice directs them confidently without having seen it.

Restaurants in Alcabideche are like chapels in Wales. There is always some new delicate doctrine involving fresh coriander and salt cod.

At Christ's birth, codfish loom on our TVs, glottal as Pavarotti, roaring *Hark the herald* etc. (The turkeys wilt and swoon.)

2.

Bacalhau again! I found it in Soho, but 'it comes from Hull' said Luigi, his moustache quivering at the absurdity: 'they send the heads to Portugal.'

I hugged it under my elbow, a brown paper rugby ball in a neat net of string, and set off across London.

At the F.O.
they were bombing Libya.
'One moment, sir.'

'It's *bacalhau*,' I said.
'Sir?'
'Salt dry cod.'

Gingerly, he weighed the device,
gave it a gentle wobble,
smelt it and held it to his ear
listening to the music of the seas.

'Salt. Dry. Cod, sir?'
'They send the heads to Portugal
under the Treaty of Windsor.'

He kissed the air and a dog,
special breed, tall
as the hat stand ambled
from the office, taking control.

My casket was offered knee high
like myrrh or frankincense
and I thought of the hundred recipes
simmering in the brown egg

– *bacalhau*

in the glorious names
of Bulhão Pato, Gomes de Sá,
Balalha Reis. António Lemos,
Zé do Pipo and Brás.

– *bacalhau*

with cheese, with onions,
with potatoes and spinach,
with milk, rice, leeks, oysters,
parsley, prawns, flour with egg white
– *bacalhau* 'with everything'

in the peasant style

with carrots

in the manner of heaven,
in twists like a corkscrew,
from Trás os Montes

Guarda, Porto,

Lamego,

Ericeira,

Alentejana, even

The despoiled Algarve,

And our winter favourite

– *bacalhau que nunca chega*,

'the cod that's never enough' –

I watched them hatching in the dog's
nostrils, clamouring
to spawn in the cold seas
of their birth.

(Ghadafi'd
have surrendered on the instant,
adding his own touch
of tabina and walnuts.)

The Alsatian took a quarter sniff
turning its tail contemptuously.
Cook, poet, comedian,
I was harmless.
Our government's in safe paws.

(Alice White faults this poem for not including *Bacalhau á moda da Guida*, as prepared by Margarida Maria da Cruz Mergulhão of Casal Verde, Figueira da Foz.)

LET ME TELL YOU, JACK ...

(for, and after Jack Mapanje)

Let me tell you, Jack, what's beyond the veranda
Where I write most days, except when the north wind
Blasts from York across Biscay to ravage
Our pottery garden of the plants you know from home
– Hibiscus, elephant ears, Mary's milk, *piri-piri*.

I've lost count of the half poems launched to probe
For metaphors to enshrine what's out there. *Enshrine!*
Don't giggle! Obsolete words, like *enamelled*
Or *the painter's palette*, invade them for colours no one
Younger than 50 in England has ever exclaimed at!

And you know well enough I don't just observe
From a height. I'm down there daily, like Wordsworth
In the gap between stanzas, peering short-sightedly
At silks thrusting from the earth, and interrogating
Passers-by for the word, though they often don't know.

So my diary is of distances, of fragments and hesitations,
About white walls daubed with laundry and geraniums,
About the moss-green valley, where nettles even in winter
Surge knee-high, and snakes fat as pythons coil in the sun.
Pine trees cast shadows blacker than Alentejo bulls,

And spring's sequence of flowers is like a carpet somehow
Lit from within, changing not by the month or the week
But hourly between daybreak and noon and dusk
As the massed gold or china-blue or tortoiseshell petals
Open, revolving with the blossoming sun, and fold and decline.

I watch the cat boxing her kittens. Boys yelp like peacocks.
Cocorico happens too often to be any use as a clock.
Oh, but laugh at this! Our morning parade, as housedogs
Walk their mistresses, each circumscribed by her territory
Marked by a tree, a lamppost, and a raised hind leg.

You would hardly know the Atlantic is just a kilometre
Off, until the stump of a hurricane howls from New York
And the rain clouds scud like caravels, their hulls
Careened by the moon. Skies are important here, stars
In their consternations, flagging imperial destinies,

So I use you as reference point, your well being differently
Based, knowing our love (another jaded word, with its
Dangerous afterlife) will survive this latest exchange
Of countries and poems. This valley beyond my veranda
Is my newest mystery, my second-hand Brazil,

Where I'm less ex-patriate than in York. Out there
Between the almond trees and blue-black cypresses
Is a field of flowers where the Angolans are playing football.
Language will come. I want to continue living
Where I will always marvel at precisely where I am living.

DAEMIENNE SHEEHAN

My First Englishman

'Abe Lincoln was an honest man.'

O'Rourke, our history teacher, slammed *Golden Horizons* shut and gazed at us conspiratorially. 'Or so it says here.' He paused to scratch his stubble reflectively, a dry rasp we listened to with open mouths. 'Not only was Lincoln a saint but Washington was taller than Napoleon.'

We waited for the truth. O'Rourke perched himself on Emily LaPlante's desk. He grinned. O'Rourke, third generation Irish-Canadian single male, age 26, was about to shape a generation. We sighed collectively.

There wasn't a ten-year-old girl in the class who hadn't signed her name Mrs O'Rourke at one time or another when his back was turned. And there wasn't a boy who didn't see himself in crumpled cords and battered Adidas trainers someday. O'Rourke had it all, wavy hair, a snarly smile, he even had dimples. We're counting on you, our eyes said, give us the low-down.

'The truth is, Lincoln was a penny-pinching slave-driver and, as for Washington, what do you think his men called him behind his back? Anyone? Barry?'

'Clacker?'

'Clacker?'

'Because of his false teeth, sir?'

'Good try but wrong. Next? One of the girls for a change? Mary?'

'Duck-wiggle?'

'Almost... Duck, starts with an a, a-s...'

'Duck-ass?'

'Correct. Why? Because he was short and fat and everytime he wore his general's jacket to lead the troops, he looked like a short fat waddling duck. End of story. But enough about the Americans. Tell me something about our first Prime Minister, MacDonald.'

'He was a drunk.'

'Good lad. What else?'

'He used to sneak down the back stairs of his office to avoid his enemy.'

'Why?'

'His enemy led a different party that didn't like drink. They were all out to get him.'

O'Rourke leaned back with a slow satisfied smile. 'You see, that's the difference between America and Canada. The Americans have to make a

hero out of everybody. We don't need heroes. We have MacKenzie King, the third Prime Minister who had a dog named...'

'King.'

'And what did MacKenzie used to talk to his dog about?'

'Foreign policy.'

'Exactly.'

It was 1972 and the national fever we had been plunged into by Trudeau-mania was not about to let up. All over Canada, history teachers gleefully dished out the dirt on America, heaping it up until it spilled over. O'Rourke went further. Look, he'd tell us, they have dirt but we have even more dirt. It seemed we were the only nation in the world that was willing to face up to facts.

As for our then leader, the fearless gappy-toothed Pierre Trudeau – now there was buckets of style and scandal. 'Joie de vivre,' our mothers murmured. The red carnation in Trudeau's lapel was world famous, a symbol of his devil-may-care approach to the international arena. It smelled of Gallic gall, nouvelle cuisine and it smelled of his manhood. 'I'm here,' said the carnation on tour in China, in Russia and in America, 'I'm here to have fun on behalf of the Canadian people and I'm not going home until I've seen absolutely everything.'

Did it matter that the carnation was pumped full of dye and turned into a pulpy spam-coloured ball by the end of the day? No. Because none of the other leaders had dared to put so much as a Red Cross pin in their lapel. None of the other leaders had such a young wife. Margaret Trudeau had gone through a hippie stage. The evidence was there at the wedding. Didn't she suppress a giggle as she knelt at the altar? Wasn't that a hippie wedding dress, no nips, no tucks, just pure flow? We knew what was really going on. The Trudeaus were a hot couple and Canada was on fire.

It wasn't until Margaret's 1980s autobiography that it slipped Trudeau was a teetotalling tightwad that never so much as sipped a Spritzer. Or paid for one. 'Divorce,' said Mother, 'brings out the worst. That Margaret was a spendthrift on drugs. She was sick.'

But in spite of our belief that Americans as well as everyone else were dying to emigrate to Canada in the 1970s, there was still one nation left to conquer, one nation left to impress. Mother England, or simply, Mother.

'Canada,' proclaimed O'Rourke, 'is not a melting pot like America, a place of forgetfulness, step off the boat and that's it, finito, say good-bye to the motherland forever. No, Canada has never been America.' Eyes gleaming, cheeks flushed, O'Rourke marched up and down the aisle, pounding fist into palm. 'What,' he shouted, 'is Canada?'

'Um, a, umm, mosaic, sir?'

'Louder.'

'A mosaic... sir?'

'Everyone together... A...? Together... now, I can't hear you.'

'A mosaic, SIR.'

'Correct, Canada is a place of remembrance, we remember where we came from. Example, Maude, where are you from?'

'Well, there's a bit of everything really, there's even some Jew,' I said.

'You can't be Jewish,' Cicily whispered. 'This is a Catholic school, you'll have to leave.'

'But it's true...'

'Fine, fine,' said O'Rourke soothingly. 'She's a Heinz 57.'

'Isn't that an Americanism, sir?'

'Show-off, afro-head,' someone hissed. I could hear cut-throat taunts of 'grease-ball', 'abortion-case', 'retard' and 'fang-face'.

'That's enough, lads. Fair play, there's nothing worse than thirty against one. Now my point is maybe it's time to stop saying we're Irish-Canadians and Italian-Canadians and Yugoslavians and start saying we're Canadians.'

Flummoxed, we stared at O'Rourke. Give up our heritage? What would our parents say? Turn our back on our relics? All that china-ware carted across continents in leaky, rat-ridden, scurvy-soaked ships? Those gorgeous shepherdess figurines posing coyly in genuine mahogany what-nots from the Old Country? What about all those special holidays and feast-days? Those terrific presents, real gold necklaces, watches with compass hands, five-dollar bills in onion-skin envelopes? Give up all that? Couldn't it wait?

O'Rourke never mentioned the concept of the stand-alone Canadian after that day. It was a dead end and he knew it. There was a feeling that he had gotten us halfway and it would be a few more generations before we renounced Mother. It would take time and maybe a revolution. He only hoped the Americans wouldn't invade first. Canadians, he reasoned, were like cows in the field. You couldn't go in there waving your arms about wildly. They'd just stare at you and go on chewing. That's if they didn't get nervous and stampede. Let them decide for themselves, he concluded. Besides, he had found a girlfriend.

After O'Rourke was seen at Sunday Mass with a long-haired brunette in calf-high brown vinyl boots and a denim maxi-skirt open to the knees and embroidered with daisies, the girls in class lost their passion for wars and Prime Ministers. The 'lady acquaintance' looked a lot like Margaret Trudeau. 'I think it's serious or he wouldn't have taken her to Mass,' Mother said. 'She's going to be The One.' As for myself, after O'Rourke looked to marriage, I looked to England. One day, I decided, I don't know where, I don't know when, we're going to meet.

That summer our family went fruit picking for 'pin-money'. In fact, my father was on strike from the assembly-line and we were strapped for cash. So every morning, at five o' clock, we'd pile into the 1957 Chrysler. 'Handmade, a good year,' said Mother. In paper bags from Potter and Shaw Drugs were lettuce sandwiches on Wonder bread, a twinkie each and a root beer. The three of us squished into the back seat and tried to go

back to sleep.

In the front, Mother painted her lips fire-engine red. 'You never know who you're going to meet,' she said. 'But always remember too much make-up and you look like a ship about to sink.' She wore lilac capri trousers, a sleeveless white top and white espadrilles. In her wide-brimmed straw hat, she was a dead ringer for Audrey Hepburn. Mother rubbed cream into her hands and sighed. As tiny as a Chinese courtesan and with hips like a matador, Mother looked out the window as she added and re-added the weekly expenses. The scent of her cream surrounded us like a sweet fog as we fell asleep.

By the time we reached the strawberry fields, our thighs were stuck to the leather and we were bursting for a pee. 'Behind the car, hurry,' Mother hissed.

In the fields the Italians had already filled their fourth quart. 'Look, they always get the nice fat red ones. I wonder if they stuff the bottom of the basket with leaves,' Mother railed. 'It's our own fault, we're never going to get anywhere if we can't even fill up our baskets on time. Next thing you know, they'll own the farm. And it's all your fault for sleeping in. Now, remember, no fooling around today in the patch, work, work, work, that's what I want to see.'

The Italians were not really from Italy, except for the old black-garbed women with hairy underarms and the bushy-browed grandfathers who, with a grimace, lowered themselves onto giant handkerchiefs carefully spread over dry bumpy ground. The children, mainly third generation, were raised like kids in Italy thirty years ago. I recognized Luigi the Tiger who was going to be a football star and Maria who already had a hope chest at the age of 11. But there was someone new in the field. Someone vastly more interesting than the Italians.

There he stood underneath the blaring sun like a mushroom, white and sort of soggy looking. He wore purple flares with yellow stars on the pockets and a skintight green undershirt. Rust coloured hair tickled his bony shoulders as he squinted at us. Everything about him roared, 'I'm not from here, I'm different, I'm new.' He was as exotic a creature as I had ever seen and he was sixteen.

The stranger spoke. 'Alright?'

Was it a question or was he telling us he was alright? Then it hit us. He was speaking English. He was English. We drew nearer to this visiting marvel, this cultural colossus we had heard of but never... touched. As he came towards us, we shivered, afraid to show our ignorance by talking. Instead we looked at each other, and giggled nervously.

'Geez,' we said, 'are you really English?'

'Absolutely,' he grinned, revealing chipped grey teeth. 'London, England, I'm here on a working holiday.'

'A holiday?' my sister tittered. 'Here?'

'Why not?'

'Well...', we stalled, torn between telling him St Catharines was a waste of time and wanting him to think it was worth visiting.

'Do you have a girlfriend?' my sister asked.

He laughed. 'No, but if you know of any gorgeous birds who need a date, let me know. Especially if they're blonde.'

'Are birds special girls?'

'I should think so.'

'A working holiday, you say,' Mother interrupted. 'Well, you better start working and stop holidaying.'

'I am working, I'm teaching them English.'

'If the Queen's English is good enough for the Queen then it's good enough for us... But that's not what you're speaking, is it?' Mother smiled menacingly. 'Where exactly are you from in London?'

'The best part, Dagenham,' he flushed.

'Digham,' Mother paused. 'I'll have to ask my next-door neighbour about that. He's from London too. He's a University Professor. He'll know where Dig... ham is.' She grabbed my hand.

'Say something,' I asked him.

'What?'

'Anything, you know, just say something,' I pleaded.

'Okay. The forecast for today is extremely hot with a violent gust coming in from the right...'

'Come on, we're not here to listen to the weatherboy.' Mother pulled us along the dusty rows.

'Wow,' I shouted, 'that was amazing.'

'There's no need to hero-worship him, you know,' Mother berated us. 'He's just a boy.'

'He's from England.'

'Who says it's the good part of England, eh? He's probably from the slums. You can't own your own house over there, that's why they're all crying to get into Canada. You think he's a big shot but I'll bet my bottom dollar his family is as broke as Kingdom Come.'

'Who cares?'

'Yeah, who cares?'

Mother turned in despair to the Italian grandmother behind her. 'Were your children like this?'

'Worse, you wouldn't believe the agony...'

'Just because he's English, you're ready to lick his feet,' she fumed. 'The English wouldn't even rent to your uncles during the war, there were signs all over the place saying No Irish and there they were, good Canadian soldiers doing dirty work for the English. The English, ha, what about the Irish?'

'Ha,' said the Italian, spitting out a strawberry, 'the English, they know nothing about food, they eat grease like the pig...'

'You see,' said Mother triumphantly, 'that's why he's so pale, a diet of

grease. He's got a funny smell too, sour like old pee-stained sheets.'

'We Italians show the English the way to bath,' the Italian interjected, 'but... like animals, they hate water.' She threw up her hands in disgust.

The days were glorious and the strawberry patch, a foreign land. It didn't matter what the adults told us about Jack. That summer we couldn't get enough of him. We followed him everywhere, apeing his pigeon-toed walk, repeating slang, vying for a crooked smile. 'Alright', 'she's tasty', 'nice bird', 'give us a fag', 'do us a favour'. We called him 'Guv'. He called us 'mate'. We were 'well in with him', he said, 'as thick as thieves'. Mother continued to mutter darkly and harangue us about half-empty baskets but none of it mattered. We were in love.

It was time, we thought, to show him how much. It was time we got him married. To a Canadian. That way he'd stay in Canada... forever.

Herlinda, who was seventeen, worked at the open-air fruit market up the road from the farm. After preparing ornamental flower seedlings in early spring, the market was pretty dead. There were occasional truckers and weekend gardeners but most of the time Herlinda sat behind the counter with an Evangeline cream soda and read. When we came in to tell her about the interesting Englishman who wanted to meet her, she was in the middle of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. 'Oh,' she said, startled, pushing her glasses back up her nose, 'that's funny, I don't remember any Englishman coming in, I would've remembered the accent.'

'He's shy, he said he was too shy to speak to you so we thought you could come and see him, like maybe this week...'

'Well, I really think he should come here...'

'Okay, when?'

'Good heavens, I don't know, whenever...'

'Okay,' we said, running out.

My brother thought that Herlinda should get rid of her glasses and my sister thought she should brush her hair.

'She's fine,' I said. 'She's blonde, he likes blondes and she's not fat or anything...'

'Yeah, but maybe she reads too much...'

'She's fine,' I said crossly, 'and she'll give him free pop.'

Back in the field my brother sidled up to Jack. 'Hey, I got to tell you something, there's this girl...'

'You like someone, do you? Where is she? Here?'

'No, for you I mean, a blonde...'

'Spit it out, mate.'

'There's this girl who asked about you. I think she likes you... She's blonde and everything...'

'You're taking the piss.'

'What? Taking the what?'

'Never mind, go on.'

'No, what was that, I'm taking a piss?'

'The, the piss.'

'Oh.'

'Don't let it eat you up, mate. What about this girl?'

It took a week of build-up but we finally got him in the right frame of mind for walking up the road. We told him Herlinda liked skinny-dipping. Next Friday, he said, after I get paid, I'll pop in.

Then we had a brainstorm. A makeover for Herlinda. I went to Mother when she was between washing up and fixing the screen door.

'This could be marriage,' I said. 'Otherwise Herlinda might never meet anyone.'

'Marriage, without an education? And what happens when he gets sick or laid off? Absolutely not. She's too young.'

'Okay, maybe not marriage but still a real important date.'

'She should wait for someone who owns real trousers.'

'But he looks like a rock star. They all do in England. He's funny too and he'll make her laugh. I bet they get married and everything, especially if you help her get dressed.'

Mother looked horrified. 'I can't do that. Style is a very intimate thing. Her mother would never forgive me.'

'Just tell her to brush her hair.'

'Absolutely not.'

'Well then, it will be a big failure, all because of you.'

'She'll be fine, she has good child-bearing hips, a lot of men like that. Style's not everything, I once knew a woman with three chins and she was so much fun to be with she got a doctor.'

'How many chins did he have?'

'One and don't be snippy.'

'She'd need a doctor if she had three chins...'

'You know something? You're going to end up in a ditch with no-one if you don't learn to shut up.'

The next time Mother went into the market she was carrying a special edition Chateline Summer Beauty magazine that she left behind accidentally. The following day she returned and said, 'You wouldn't happen to have found a magazine on all sorts of things, skin-care and posture...'

'I have it right here, Mrs. Fitzpatrick.'

'Oh good, you know there's a very interesting article on hair-care, funnily enough there's this swoopy thing you can do with long, curly hair like yours, where is it now... the things you pick up, have you ever thought about posture, it's fascinating how it changes your appearance...'

When we dropped by to tell Herlinda what day to expect Jack, she still had the magazine. 'Remember Jack?' I said, and she blushed scarlet from the face to the neck.

'I forgot all about him, where did you say he was from?'

'London, and yellow's his favourite colour,' I replied. 'He's coming in

on Friday. Did you know he hasn't seen the lopsided lama at Fawn Hill Nature Farm?

'Well, it is his first time in Canada. He can't be expected to know where everything is. But it'd be a shame if he went without seeing the canal.'

'That lama's something else, so bad-tempered and a hump just hanging off the side like it's going to fall off.'

'I suppose there's always the quarry...'

On Friday, Jack wore blue bell-bottoms with paisley inserts and a green satin shirt. He walked into the market and past Herlinda who sat behind the cash register with some of her hair swooped up and the rest bursting out of a butterfly clip. Her yellow sun-dress had an elasticized waist and big pockets with pink piping. Herlinda had painted her finger and toenails and was wearing rouge. She looked like a thirty-year-old divorcee.

Jack wandered among the seed trays and bug sprays and stopped at the fertilizer. We sucked grape popsicles and stared from our standpoint underneath the dwarf Maple tree. He looked away and began circling the lawn ornaments.

'It sure was hot today, wasn't it?' I said.

'Quite,' he replied.

I nodded to Herlinda. 'Jack's from England, it's not as hot there.'

'Oh?' said Herlinda.

'Yes,' Jack smiled briefly at her.

'Well...' Herlinda waited. Jack twirled the seed packet rack around and around.

Licking her lips nervously, Herlinda rubbed the back of her neck. 'That's very far, isn't it, England?'

'Somewhat.' Jack stopped the rack with one finger.

'Jack lives in London, right next door to Big Ben,' said my sister.

'Really? That must be awfully loud when you're trying to sleep,' said Herlinda.

Jack looked up and laughed. Herlinda, puzzled by his reaction, began rearranging the chocolate bars. Colour appeared underneath her rouge.

'I hear there's a new restaurant with amazing burgers and this big ball covered in mirrors hanging from the ceiling. Have you been there, Herlinda?' my brother asked. 'They have spaceship milkshake glasses you get to take home for free.'

Jack and Herlinda skirted around the burger issue for a while, whether you could taste the difference between an American burger and a Canadian one and then it was set, the big date.

We didn't see Jack for three days. Then he turned up late for work looking as if he would rather be left alone.

I sat next to him without saying a word because I didn't know if he wanted me to talk. When he finally opened his mouth his words came out as hard and chipped as bits of gravel. All he talked about was a rock band he wanted to form, called The Electric Druids, and how he needed to get

back to where things were really happening, Dagenham, London. He would sort out something with his mates, he said. We asked him about Herlinda. Did he like her?

'She likes her books, doesn't she?' he replied, scornfully.

'Don't you think she's pretty?'

'She's not my style.' He went quiet again as if he had said something too close to the bone then added apologetically, 'She likes Burt Bacharach and Nana Mouskouri. Know what I mean? Easy listening.'

'But Nana's wonderful,' I said.

'Of course, if you like that sort of thing...' He looked over his shoulder then poured half his basket into mine, because that's what friends were for, he said.

Herlinda was starting a new book, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, when we went in to ask her about Jack. She put it down reluctantly, only long enough to say, 'He hasn't even read Dickens. Not to mention Thomas Hardy. He may be English but I don't think much of his education.'

She told Mother later that he had a peculiar smell like something badly fermented and that he was pushy with his hands. 'Perhaps he doesn't know any better,' said Mother, 'perhaps his parents...'

'That's another thing, he thinks he knows everything, he thinks he's superior to us.'

'Oh dear,' said Mother. 'I've heard this before about the English. He's going to have to learn the Hard Way.'

We stopped following Jack around so much and days went by when we hardly spoke to him at all. My sister and I sniffed surreptitiously if he was beside us. We started a Rank Days chart with a scale of one to ten. Only my brother remained steadfastly loyal.

'He just smells like a guy, that's all,' he'd say, 'it's no big deal.'

Jack, used to our company, sought out obscure slang to lure us back. For a while it worked. But then, towards the end of summer, underneath a cold milky blue sky, Jack's last attempt to reclaim our affections ended in a puff of strawberry field dust as we wheeled away on barefoot heels. There Jack stood, grinning crookedly and saying, 'Have you seen my imitation of a Canadian?'

Enchanted, we drew closer. He planted his feet a shoulder width apart and reached with both hands for an invisible holster. In his pockets were two card punchers which he grabbed, spun round, blew into like two pistols and shoved back in his pockets. 'Heeey pardner, I'm gonna shoot you up,' he said.

We looked at him in disgust. 'That's American,' we retorted. 'You've done an American, that's horrible. Canadians are completely different.'

We stopped speaking to him altogether. Mother noticed and berated us behind the monolithic Chrysler. 'He was only trying to make you laugh. How can you be so awful?'

'You told us not to hero-worship him. Besides he stinks.'

'I said don't hero-worship him. I didn't say drag him through the dirt and spit on his grave. Now be nice to him, he's all alone over here. How would you feel?'

'He thinks we're Americans.'

'So what, what's wrong with that? At least they're friendly. You don't mind Disney films and oranges from Florida at Christmas. This is the last time I say it, stop bullying him. On top of everything else he has to go back to England. They don't even have proper plumbing over there.'

Mother was Jack's protector the last three weeks, threatening us with 'a good kick up the backside' if so much as one nostril dilated in his presence.

'Your mother,' she told him, 'must be very proud of you. You're as quick as the Italians at picking. I'll bet she really misses you.'

They chatted about England like adults, comparing taxes and house repairs. 'A little snow can destroy a house,' she'd say. 'I know, I've been there.' One afternoon, Jack, in a shy halting way, showed her a photograph of his family, a tired-looking mother in her late fifties with four sons. 'I admire her,' said Mother, 'bringing you up by herself and so well too. She deserves a medal. But I'm sure you tell her that all the time.'

The summer dragged to an end fretfully like a child sent to bed prematurely. Underneath an unpredictable sun, we sweated and shivered in turns as we hunted for the last strawberries. As Jack's leaving day approached, we rejoined him with a sullen affection and a clearer eye, resenting him slightly for not being a hero but wanting to put a blanket around his frail English shoulders to keep him safe from cold wet shores. On his last day in Canada he came to the fields to say goodbye before the bus took him to Toronto.

We stood and ate picnic snacks off the hood of the Chrysler. 'We got you something,' we said, handing him a giant card with teddy bears picnicking on a soft green hill. 'To Our English Guv', it read, 'I hope you enjoyed our beautiful country, with warm regards, Mrs Fitzpatrick', and 'It was very fun knowing you, you told lots of good jokes and made us laugh, Yours til Niagara Falls, Your Canadian pals'. In a small box was a key chain with The Maid of the Mist Honeymoon Ferry at Niagara Falls in a plastic case filled with water. Tilted slightly, the boat magically disappeared behind the Falls. 'That's so you don't forget us,' we explained. 'You can carry it around in your pocket and use it for your English keys. Every time you open the door we'll be with you.'

SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM

American Higher Education

Swee left for New York four weeks after the Feast of the Hungry Ghosts.

'So lucky, you!' Mary Choo said enviously. They had sat for the Senior exams together. But Mary, who had out-scored Swee in total A grades, was stuck in Malacca, looking at two more years of pre-college textbooks, lamenting her father's decision to send her to the university in Kuala Lumpur. She even forgot to make fun of Swee's college choice, New York Pepsodent College, although everyone else didn't. 'What for study in Pepsodent? You study for dental hygienist, ah?' Auntie May had asked. 'All life look into people's smelly mouth.'

Mama had agreed to let Swee go far away although it was only the first year of Ah Kong's death because Swee was waking up nights screaming. In her nightmares, Ah Kong pecked at her shoulders with horny claws. Awake, she felt his hard head rapping against her bones.

Ah Voon scolded furiously. 'All this because you didn't drop tears at Ah Kong's funeral. Now if you burn some joss at the altar, cry, and beg him to forgive you, your bad dreams will go away. But to leave your mother when she is still wearing black! What are daughters for?'

To appease Ah Kong's spirit, Mama invited Abbott Narasimha from the White Elephant Buddhist Temple in Penang to chant the Lotus Sutra. According to the Temple's dedication papers, he was the same world-famous monk who had preached at the Swe Dagon in Rangoon in 1956, and at the London Theosophical Institute in 1960. Mama paid for his first-class air ticket, and his accommodation at Tanjong Rhu Resort, the ice-cube palace a few miles away, built with Sultan Rehman's money just two years ago in 1984, at the height of Japanese investment in Malacca. Tanjong Rhu lured Japanese tourists by advertising expensive French Hennessy brandy, Spanish-rolled cigars, and all-night karaoke.

Mama also presented the Abbott with a cheque (she wouldn't tell the girls how much) in a bright red envelope delicately webbed with calligraphy that Peik had ink-brushed.

Swee and Yen laughed at Peik for encouraging Mama in her Buddhist adventure. Alone of the three sisters, Peik attended morning and evening services every Sunday at the Lorong Pinyin Methodist Church. But she was unabashed. 'Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." It's too late for Ah Kong to make penance, but why stand in Mama's

way?’

It didn't matter that Ah Kong had not been a Buddhist, Mama explained. The important thing was to get his ghost into Paradise, and to stop haunting them in the kitchen where his icy-brown corpse had lain all night with frozen irises fixed on the refrigerator's interior light.

Abbott Narasimha led a team of monks into the house to chant the Lotus Sutra. Leaving their polished copper begging bowls in a heap by the kitchen door, shoulders and bony collar bones bare and brown like mahogany, they wrung chimes from prayer bells, and their saffron robes, coloured ripe persimmons, blew in the winds from the standing fans Ah Voon had set up to cool the room.

Swee and Yen couldn't decide how old the men were. Their bald scalps didn't give away their age. After the first morning Swee got to like their chanting. Together, their voices didn't rattle as much as drone; not as peacefully as she had anticipated, but drilling a repetitious demand, the low and high tones sounding like giant bees humming for nectar.

Ecstatic, refusing help from the neighbours' maids, Ah Voon prepared masses of vegetarian noodles stir-fried with astonishing varieties of beancurd. Dried, pressed, baked, fried, puffed, steamed, salted, spiced, seasoned, shaped into balls and squares, sticks, twigs, and ropes, they looked just like duck-breasts, beef-balls, air-dried meat, pork cutlets, chicken livers and gizzards. Swee couldn't taste the difference between them, but the Abbott, the monks, and Mama's visitors ate as much as Ah Voon served, all day a march of dishes circling the tables.

On the first day of the rituals, as they were watching her shape her tofu imitations, Ah Voon, no longer disapproving and sullen, burst out in voluble Hokkien, 'I never told your father I was a follower of the Abbess Tien Hin, who led the Ten Thousand Blossoms Women's Association. In Amoy I cooked for a *kong-si* owned by the Hakka members of the Ten Thousand Blossoms. We swore to be faithful, never to marry or have children, never to eat meat. We were so happy together! But the *kong-si* ran out of money, and your father took me away from Amoy to serve your mother. All this was years before the three of you were born!'

All day she commanded the care of the altar table while the monks, averting their eyes, chanted and rang the bells. Burning a bundle of joss-sticks every hour, she tended to the over-sized bowl of ash. She groomed the offerings of glowing tangerines and pyramids of globed pomelos and red-stamped wheat buns, and whisked at fungus, ordinary dust, stray hairs, and every encroaching sign of decay.

The combs of yellow bananas in front of Ah Kong's blown-up photograph – taken when he was a young man, perhaps when he was still an up-and-coming timber tycoon in Sarawak, for it had the faint address of a studio in Kuching at the bottom – remained perfectly gold, with never a brown blotch

appearing through the three days it took to chant the whole of the Lotus Sutra.

Swee marvelled at how Ah Voon kept the fruit pristinely fresh, till she was allowed to eat them on Monday morning. Ah Voon had painted each banana with a clear coat of mineral wax. When Swee peeled a banana for breakfast, the wax cracked into white crumbs, and the flesh inside was unripe and bitter. She had to throw it out.

'Do you have to go?' Yen asked.

Swee was packing her black clothes for America, funerary costume which Mama had tailor-made for them to wear day and night for the three-year mourning period. Abbott Narasimha had instructed Mama – four women alone! he'd warned – to follow the strictest Confucianist observations on Ah Kong's death. Mama even had fresh pyjamas of black polished cotton sewn up for all of them.

Ah Kong had not shared with Mama the name of the Sarawakan he was matchmaking for Yen, so Yen's arranged marriage fell through with his death. On the other hand, as Swee pointed out to Mama, although Yen was almost twenty, now that she had her own fortune, she had all the time in the world to decide what to do with her life.

But Swee, not yet eighteen, was in a hurry to leave. When the bananas finally turned brown, she remembered Ah Kong's liver-spotted face. She dreamed of Ah Kong hovering, a pale vapour in front of the open refrigerator. In her dreams she saw his face back-lit by a mirror reflecting off her body, and smoke tumbling out of his wide-open livid eyes. His white hairs no longer floated in odd places in the house yet she felt the absence of his weekly visitant body in the rooms, rooms kept unnaturally clean, dusted, mopped, picked up, smelling of caustic soda, swept meticulously, by Ah Voon who moved from corner to corner, obliterating all signs of disintegration.

As soon as the visa came from the American embassy, Swee bought her air-ticket to New York. From Kennedy Airport, the travel agent cautioned her, she was to take a shuttle bus to another airport called Newark, then board a smaller plane to Albany, where a student would meet her to drive her to Pepsodent College.

'Promise me you wear all black until the three years are finish,' Mama insisted. 'If you put on any other colour, Ah Kong's ghost will be angry!'

Swee was happy to promise Mama that. She didn't need Ah Kong to follow her to America.

She was not the only one to worry about appeasing his spirit. Peik gave Pastor Fung \$500 for the Sunlight Beneficent Old People's Charity in memory of Ah Kong. Their lawyer Mr. Chia had advised Peik to keep a separate bank account since she was a rich woman in her own right, and she

not seventeen years old! The cheque to Pastor Fung was the first one Peik had ever signed.

In many ways, Swee thought, despite being four years younger, Peik was more advanced than Yen. Yen didn't want to leave Mama, and she didn't want Swee to leave either. She had never grown those wings Swee wanted so badly to use.

'Don't go!' she begged on Swee's last night home, moaning without shame, mucus running down her nose like thickened tears. 'Oh, oh, oh, oh, Swee's leaving us, she'll never come back!'

'What bad luck!' Mama muttered. 'To say such a bad luck thing! Rubbish!' Mama was losing her dulcet tones fast, now Ah Kong was gone.

Aloud, Mama consoled Yen. 'Swee got a round-trip ticket, and she coming home same month next year, alright, Swee? Anyway, after you finish secretarial course, you can go visit her in America. Pastor Fung say Pepsodent College in beautiful and safe New York country part. Two of you can go look-see look-see all over America.'

Swee knew Yen would never go. Yen was terrified of flying. Gulls and pigeons have pea-sized brains, she said, that's how they fly. But humans with their big brains can't stay up.

Crying till she shook, with her wet eyes and damp red nose Yen reminded Swee of the puppy which, after only three weeks with them, had run out onto the main road and was struck by a Malacca-Kuala Lumpur taxi. It was a shivery thing, born under a scary star, and it never stopped shaking, even in their laps. Peik had proclaimed it a sick pup which should be put to sleep, but Yen hid it under her towels in her bedroom and Mama didn't have the heart to wrench it away from her. Ah Voon had left the gate open the afternoon the puppy was run over, and Swee still wondered how, too timid even to venture out of Yen's bedroom, it had escaped from the house.

Ah Voon refused to speak about Swee's leaving. Whenever Mama raised it, she began to pick books, shoes, cushions, lint off the floor. Or she brought out the large straw broom and banged it around furniture, or squatted in the kitchen to clean the refrigerator's bottom coils one more time.

When they were younger, Yen and Swee had made up stories that Ah Voon was Ah Kong's secret lover in Fujian. Ah Voon had been devoted to turning out his virility dishes every Saturday – sweet lotus-seed-stuffed buns, she claimed, for fathering many children; bitter melon in rich pork soup for tranquil fornication; ginkgo nuts and tree-ear fungi fried with liver to enrich the blood before ejaculation; jellied pig-blood and ginger to heat his lust. Swee believed Ah Kong came home for Ah Voon's cooking as much as for Mama's obedience. His eyes turned milky with greed at the dining table, and he was forever complimenting Mama on managing to keep Ah Voon with the family.

Mama said that Ah Kong had first hired Ah Voon for her, even before the wedding, and she never asked what he paid Ah Voon each month. After the

funeral Yen and Swee waited for Ah Voon to quit.

The night before Swee left for New York, Ah Voon called the taxi company, ironed her underwear, packed them in the suitcase, baked a sooji cake for her to take on the plane, then padded around the kitchen as if nothing had changed. 'You write to your Ah Mama,' was all she said, 'and don't make her cry!'

Then Swee knew it was Mama whom Ah Voon had been devoted to for more than twenty years. She served Mama's gliding voice, Mama's dimpled smiles, Mama's slow lazy body. All those virility dishes for Ah Kong were to bring Mama satisfaction. Ah Voon was never going to leave Mama.

Flying on the Pan-Am Boeing 707 was a relief. Swee liked the cold dry artificial air blowing out of vents, the mechanical voice of the pilot crackling with static, 'We are now climbing 20,000 feet above sea-level', the bodies packed in tight rows like robots. She liked being in the compact steel and plastic machine, different from the hot moist atmosphere of Malacca and Malaysians. She knew there could be no fungus, no green mould or brown spores fuzzing her seat, no passenger on board like Mama and Ah Voon demanding she showed proper feelings and thoughts.

The white hazy clouds outside the port window were like so much trailing smoke to her speed. Relieved, uncertain, guilty, sorry, worried, free, elated, suspended between Mama and New York, Swee wished she could remain between the two for a while longer.

But after three breakfasts, two dinners and one lunch, she was scrambling for her two suitcases at the Kennedy terminal, her new passport and student visa crammed down her jeans pocket so tight a pickpocket would have to peel her like a banana to get to them.

Albany was a disappointment. Pastor Fung hadn't told her it would seem smaller than Malacca. In September at 5.30 p.m. the sky was already sickly-grey, and a cold wind whistled in her ears and through the industrial cinder-block airport buildings, empty runways blotched by oil-slicks, and parking lots with cars like museum behemoths and no people in them. Glass shards, soda cans, bottles, tall weedy strands resembling shredded ferns poked out of vacant lots, and rags and sheets of newsprint wrapped their presences around the buckled corners of pavements.

The Pepsodent student was waiting out on the curb for her. The van had graffiti written in ink on its seats. She read 'Bulls charge!' 'Go, Bulls, go', 'Nice girls give', 'Oink', and hesitated to sit on words.

'C'mon,' he said impatiently, tossing her bags in at the back.

Should she talk to him, confess it was her first day in America? 'What day is it?' she asked as he started the engine.

He looked at her in the rear-view mirror. 'Friday.' Then he added, 'Don't you people have clocks to tell the days?'

She didn't say anything after that.

Swee had arrived ten days after the college semester began, too late for orientation, ice-breakers, rushes, class introductions, ice-cream socials, and welcome receptions. Americans worked fast, everything was speeded up in Pepsodent College. By the time she arrived, many of the students already had their courses signed for, boyfriends and girlfriends picked, sororities, fraternities, and social clubs fixed.

She had the smallest suite in the quad, the suite from which earlier roommates had migrated as they found other vacancies. It was the suite for absentee students, the freshman who fell ill with mononucleosis and had to put off college for a year, one whose father's business had unexpectedly failed and who couldn't make the fees, and another who found herself pregnant and had decided to get married.

She discovered all this weeks later, but for the first few nights she waited for her roommates to show up, live Americans who listened to the latest in pop music, and who would teach her how to dress like an American, which professors to study with, what to eat in the cafeteria. She was the strong second sister, Swee reminded herself. She didn't collapse like Yen when things didn't go her way.

All Friday she was alone. The suite had a shared bath area with three shower stalls and three toilets, but although she heard noises later at night she met no one.

On Saturday and Sunday she convinced the dining-hall checker she was a real student even without a meal card, but she didn't have enough courage to talk to anyone. She watched the students heap their trays full of food. As if playing a game, they piled plates on other plates, carefully balancing saucers and dishes of pies, chocolate cakes, ice-cream, and rice pudding on top of everything else.

She studied them as they ate. They were large freckled people who cut their Salisbury steak, which was only hamburger, in flamboyant gestures. They left the green beans that were strung with white fibres in piles on the sides of their trays. So sloppy! Yen would have yelled at them for the mess they made with their food.

They kept returning to the line to pick up more food, apple sauce, mashed potato and gravy, sweet potato sprinkled with marshmallows, chunks of iceberg lettuce and hard red tomatoes. Everything was sweet, including the salad dressing.

At first Swee thought they must be hungry, they put so much food on their trays. Then she noticed they threw away most of it. Even the pies with the lovely gold crusts oozing apple pieces and purple blueberry filling were only picked at, the crisped crusts thrown out.

Afraid she might be hungry later, she stole a dark red apple and put it in her coat pocket. The thought of the apple, hard and sugary, snuggled next to her hip, consoled her all day, so much so that she took an apple each morning from the dining hall.

But she was too heartsick to eat them. In a month she had a laundry basket full of starred-bottom red Delicious. Her stark little room, squashed with scratched Formica-covered built-in furniture, the desk drawers which had to be juggled closed and which had reeked of raw plywood and cockroaches, now wafted a heavy smell of apples, overbearingly sweet, like a grocery bin or like an orchard raining fantasy over-ripe fruit.

Alone at night, while she read in bed, she saw herself as a worm hidden in the heart of a giant apple. The fluorescent light jumped off the polished waxed apple skins, pooling the room with dark crimson spots. She needed the colour. Wearing all those black clothes that Mama made her pack was making her sad.

'You remind me of the Hmong,' Clarissa said. She was in Swee's American history course and found they were sharing the same corridor. 'All that black. Is it something to do with your culture?'

Swee said yes. She didn't want to talk about Ah Kong.

'You're not Hmong, are you?' Clarissa asked. The teacher was late as usual, and only six of them were in class on time. 'Those people who are coming to America from the Cambodian highlands. You look just like them.'

'What do they look like?' Swee suspected she wasn't going to like Clarissa's answer.

'Like you. My dad works with the Hmong in a refugee camp in Texas. They keep dying on him.'

'What does he do, kill them?'

She thought she was making a joke but Clarissa stiffened.

'You're not very tactful, are you?' she pouted. 'My dad says they're people from the Stone Age. They can't tell the difference between reality and television, so these young men, when they watch Dracula or the Werewolf or some other horror show, they think these spooks are for real. My dad says they're actually dying from fear! Imagine that!'

Professor Lopez came in then, and Swee didn't have time to tell Clarissa she could imagine it.

Manuel Lopez. He was a Puerto Rican, Clarissa told Swee, the only Puerto Rican professor in the history of Pepsodent College. Clarissa said he was short, but he was taller than Swee. Swee liked his moustache, his glossy skin, the dark hair twisting in hundreds of tiny fastidious curls. Nervous, skinny, he lectured dancing on his feet, black polished leather dress shoes treading back and forth in the front of the room like the paws of a big cat.

'I guess you can't be Hmong,' Clarissa decided, 'you're too Westernized. I see how you've been looking at Professor Lopez.'

By Christmas, although Swee was still sworn to wear black, she had thrown away the rotting apples and replaced them with coloured beach balls she had found for sale at Woolworth's on a shopping trip to Albany.

The Woolworth's was an impressive limestone-faced building, an emporium of cheap jeans from the Philippines, 90-cent costume jewellery from Guatemala, and gummy chocolates in fancy rose-printed boxes from Brooklyn. In November, when all the Pepsodent students had left for Thanksgiving at home, the striped red and blue and yellow and white beach balls left over from a summer sale behind the toy racks reminded her of the Jalan Raya stalls at home. She bought ten of them. The salesclerk rang up the price without taking her eyes off her, acting like Swee was going to stick a gun in her face at any minute.

The balls took up almost all the spare space in her room, and sometimes she talked to one or the other of them, her missing roommates.

Just before Christmas, Pinny came to Swee's room to introduce herself. Clarissa had pointed Hong out to Swee weeks ago in the dining hall, 'Hong from Hong Kong,' she said with a particular emphasis.

'What do you mean?' Swee stared at Pinny who was wearing tight ski pants and a yellow and lime green striped tee, like a Venus bumble-bee.

'You know, easy lay.'

Swee was shocked by her language. Clarissa was a prim born-again Christian.

'Harry told me she's slept with everyone who's asked her.' Harry was Clarissa's boyfriend whom she had just successfully invited to accept Christ into his life. Clarissa didn't work so hard on Swee, she said, because she respected her different culture.

Swee didn't ask her the obvious.

Pinny Hong, surrounded by a bunch of men, was laughing and sticking out her tongue at them. Her tongue looked seductive. She pushed out her chest, and her breasts under the tight yellow and green tee stuck out like her tongue, like yellow and green baby beach balls. Swee could hear her two tables over, her voice a kind of American G.I. accent with a heavy Chinese sing-song quality.

'Don't you spend time with her. She's a jezebel, a whore!' Clarissa got up violently and left the hall.

Swee watched as Pinny went off with the tallest of the men, her long hair rubbing on his chest as they walked out together.

Swee was surprised when Pinny knocked on her door, saying 'I'm having a party tonight, it's my twenty-first birthday, and I thought you may be free.' Pinny didn't give the beach balls a glance.

Of course Swee was free, she was always free. It was Professor Lopez she was waiting for, his head so full of dates and social ideals he didn't notice her.

'The American Revolution,' he had said last week, 'is still the most notable experiment in historical movements. That all men are created equal is the boldest of political philosophies, its consequences are still being worked out throughout the world.'

Swee thought of Ah Kong as she listened to Professor Lopez. She was

sure Ah Kong had never heard of the American Revolution. As his daughter she was still a Wing, and she knew Professor Lopez was talking to Ah Kong's ghost through her. A black Hispanic Puerto Rican and a Malaysian – created equal. She had already signed up for his American Constitution seminar next semester, and was looking forward to working with him in a smaller group.

She went to the suite which Pinny shared with some other Hong Kong students. They were full-paying students like Swee, and they had expensive music equipment, a twenty-eight inch television, expensive kitchen equipment. Pinny was the only work-study student among them. Swee had seen her checking books in the library.

Although it was snowing hard outside, the suite was packed with sweating bodies. Everyone had brought a present for Pinny. She was unlocking her bedroom and throwing the packages inside. 'Oooh,' she squealed as the presents appeared, 'nice of you! I ROVE presents.' Drunk, she was dropping her 'I's. People were hauling six-packs of Budweiser, Canadian Ale, Michelob to the kitchen counters.

Swee recognized some of the students milling in the rooms. Most were vague faces she had glimpsed at lectures. In the middle of the living room someone lit a marijuana stick, and soon a circle of dopeheads was sitting on the wall-to-wall carpet sucking on joints and passing them around like communion wafers.

She saw Clarissa's Harry come in with a package in fancy silver and purple wrapping. Couples were dancing to Bob Marley in the dark, weaving in between the sitting bodies, with only the light from the kitchen coming through as others opened and shut the kitchen door. No one was paying any attention but Swee, as Pinny took Harry's present, unlocked her bedroom door, and disappeared inside the bedroom with Harry. She didn't know when they came out because she saw Professor Lopez standing alone by the window watching the dopeheads.

When she went up to him, he gave a shrug. 'I didn't know there would be so many here, I have an asthma problem and can't stay.'

'I'll leave with you,' she offered.

'Oh, no, this is a party for young people like you. You must stay!'

'How about some Chinese food?' She pointed to the table pushed against one wall where the food was laid out, platters of stringy noodles, bowls of soy-coloured rice, beef and mushy cabbage, and where the Chemistry and English professors were filling up their plates.

He waved at the air in front of him as if to get rid of pesky flies. 'Too much smoke.'

She followed him out into the quad, into a sudden huge wintry silence. The reggae music throbbed rather than sounded out of the closed dorm windows. Snow was falling in big wet flakes. Shining incongruously, the moon radiated on the spinning flakes. Looking up she saw giant spooks of

cosmic wheels in the January sky. It was so cold her ears buzzed faintly, and she gulped large painful breaths. It was the wrong thing to do; her lungs ached immediately. She pushed her nose into the black muffler, glad for the black parka and its too-large hood, glad yet sorry Professor Lopez couldn't see her face.

'Well,' he said, 'you wrote a good paper.'

'You know who I am?'

'Swee Wing. "The Federalist papers and the 1960s civil rights movement in the South".'

'Actually, my name is Wing Swee Su, and my sisters call me Swee.'

'Sweet Wing.'

She was flattered.

'You write well for a freshman.'

'I want to be a journalist.'

'So young and already you know what you want.' Professor Lopez's bare head was spotted with melting flakes. 'Shall I walk you back to your dorm?'

The path was dark, unmarked, slippery with crystallized snow layered over weeks of old tough ice. She had never bought boots and she slid every so often where the snow gave way under her sneakers. The wet was freezing her toes but she didn't dare complain.

Professor Lopez reached out and gripped her hand to steady her. He was gloveless also. His palm, shockingly warm and huge, covered her paint-tingling hand like a deep pocket. She didn't want him to let go.

The week after the birthday party, Pinny knocked on her door again. By this time Swee had thrown out the beach balls. Manuel had said they were childish, her sense of humour immature.

'Thank you for the scarf,' Pinny said.

Swee had brought her the pink-blue-gold-coloured scarf Clarissa had given her for an early Christmas present. Clarissa was trying to break her away from wearing black, and Swee couldn't tell her that it wasn't twelve months yet since Ah Kong had been laid underground. Of course, once Swee saw Harry at the party she was sorry she had also betrayed Clarissa.

'I hear you write for the Daily Peps.' Wrapped up in a stuffed goosedown jacket, Pinny managed to look as if she would peel out of it easily. Her shiny black hair, hanging lushly down to her waist, freshly laundered, was making its statement, 'Look at her, look at her!'

Swee tried to block Pinny's view of her room. Without the crimson apples and the yellow and green balls, she had set up a shrine to Manuel. The four books for his U.S. Constitution seminar were lined up on her desk and she had taped a photograph of him she had ripped off the college yearbook in the library to the wall.

'I'm sorry, my room's a mess,' she mumbled.

'Don't worry. I just came by to say I hope you enjoyed my party.' Pinny gave Swee a slanted look. 'I give lots of parties. Lots of professors come to

them!

'Sure,' Swee stuttered, 'I had a good time.'

'I'd invite you for the next party, but I don't know when I can have it. See, I have a couple of incompletes. One of them is English 3, you know, the long essay. But, you know, if you can help me write the paper, maybe we can have another party this Saturday?'

Pinny was very confident, looking past Swee's shoulder toward her desk. 'Lots of professors will be there!'

She finished the paper for Pinny an hour before the party started, even though she knew Manuel wouldn't be there. He had promised her over the phone he would knock on her door Tuesday night when he was back from New York.

The first night of Pinny's birthday party, she didn't know what it was she couldn't believe. That Professor Lopez, whose words she had been hanging on to for the last three months, was actually kissing her. That she was letting a strange man do those horrible, wonderful things to her body. That she was letting herself be fucked by someone she had just met at a party. That Manuel's shoes were sitting neatly lined by her bedside and his prickly hairy dark legs were thrown over her thighs.

He said he couldn't believe it was the first time for Swee, that he hoped she wasn't disappointed, that his asthma was affecting his performance, that he was better when it was warmer.

She was afraid to hug him, afraid to take liberties with him. He was a black god come down for Christmas. He left, taking down the telephone number for the suite, saying he would call and see her during the break.

Manuel never came to another of Pinny's parties. In early February and March, he called three times altogether, and came to Swee's room twice. She called his office over a dozen times, but he was usually away. He had an apartment in New York, in the Bronx, and when there were no classes, he came up to Pepsodent only occasionally.

She went by his office often, found him in only once, and then they made love on the office floor.

'Manuel Lopez. Manuel Lopez,' she said his name over and over again silently and aloud at night in her room. 'Man, Man, Man, Man.' Was Lopez related to Lupus, to wolf? 'Man wolf man wolf man wolf.'

Manuel was nervous in her room. He wanted the door locked and the lights off so no one would know she was in.

'No one comes here. I'm in the room of lost room-mates,' she told him.

'I could lose my position,' he frowned, and checked the doorknob before unbuckling his belt.

'Why don't you try to find your community?' he asked her as he was leaving. 'Puerto Ricans are a communal people. In New York, I am a Puerto Rican activist. Here at Pepsodent I am only a token.'

In late March the snow began melting although the trees remained bare. Manuel had stopped welcoming her to his office. He did not keep office hours, did not answer her telephone messages, missed two seminars in a row, and scheduled quizzes, film showings and in-class exams for other days when he did not appear.

Slowly the mornings were filling with light, a solitary secret activity to which no one but Swee appeared to pay any attention. She could hear the slushy icy water flowing downhill behind her room, a constant underground gurgle, like the way she thought about Manuel constantly, sensations flowing down, down from her head to her nipples and overflowing those, lapping down through the hidden crevices, a warm despairing trickle where he had made her gush and cry only a little while ago.

She kept going to Pinny's parties – the paper she wrote for her got Pinny a B for the course – but after Manuel all the professors she met there were stupendously ugly, grey, stiff, creaky, like old used books.

'Harry say you are going to be a reporter.' Pinny had sidled up to Swee's seat in the library reading room.

'A journalist.'

'I read your story about Pepsodent being the snow campus. I like that a lot.' Swee's essay had won the annual freshman composition award, and the Daily Peps had carried it yesterday. She was suspicious about Pinny's intentions. Did she want her to write another essay for her English class?

'I wish you would tell my story,' Pinny said.

'Why should I? I make fun of everything when I write, why would I want to lose your friendship?' Swee didn't believe herself.

Pinny pouted. 'But you are a reporter. I have such an interesting life. It should be written for everyone.'

Three months was a long enough time to make them intimate friends, Pinny said. Time had a different claim in America, and Swee didn't want to reject that claim, wanting to try out everything American.

'You wouldn't like the story I'd write.'

'Of course I would. It's the story of my life, so how can I hate it?'

Swee thought Pinny extremely naive for all that she slept around. Still, she had to give her credit: Pinny was pulling bad grades, but her eyes on men and their pockets gave her the ability to like herself and to see the world on clear terms.

'All my reports are about sad and crazy things.'

'Well, this one won't be. My life is sad,' Pinny's face softened in a glow of self-delight, 'but it's fascinating. Who would believe the things that have happened to me?'

Swee felt a story twitching, a little spirit digging in the hollow like the little woman digging in another hollow just below her neck between the two breasts, the one who hammered at her when she was about to do something stupid, like speak out of turn or call Manuel.

'All right, I will.' Perversity was burrowing in the space above her nose between the eyebrows. 'What shall I call you in the report?'

'I want you to use my name. After all, I'm proud of my story.'

'All right, Hong Nga.'

'No, that's my Chinese name. Use my English name, Betty. That's the problem, telling a story from Hong Kong, finding the right names.' Pinny ignored the frowning student at the other end of the library table. 'They're all wrong, Chinese names. No one knows their meanings, making up translations like Peony Happiness or Cloud Pillars or Bright Peacekeeper or whatever meaning some old person told them but never knew for sure.

'The American names are no better. Why do you call yourself Betty, when you don't know who Betty Crocker is? Think of Cecilia whose mother can't get the c's right or the l, so what you hear is sheshe or zhezhe. American names are the worst. My sister Yen's best friend was Elvis Tay Seng Leong, who wanted me to give him special tuition in the Romantic Poets so he could get an English subsidiary and enter the university. Then you know that Thai student, Cher, who wears white lacy three-quarter-length-sleeved blouses and attends the Baptist Bible group meetings?'

When Pinny laughed Swee felt an odd generosity. Maybe she did like Pinny after all.

'Whatever can you have in common with Pinny?' Clarissa, no longer attached to Harry, was full of summer plans. She was going to Texas to intern with her father at the refugee camp. 'I don't know why someone like Pinny doesn't try to help her own community,' she complained, sitting on Swee's desk and kicking her feet against it. 'It's plain selfishness. And you're a straight A student! What can you be getting out of being with her?'

Clarissa couldn't know anything was better for Swee than sitting alone in her room, waiting for Manuel's knock on the door.

Swee was beginning to like Pinny quite a bit, but after a few more visits when Pinny told Swee about her coming into Hong Kong under cover of night from a village in Goungxou, brought over by an old man who'd promised her a good job but delivered her to a small business family looking for a concubine for the oldest son, an opium addict they were worried would end up with syphilis if he continued picking up prostitutes in the Kowloon District, she stopped coming around. Pinny had been asked to leave Pepsodent, her roommates explained, because she hadn't paid the tuition fees; Clarissa said Pinny had been expelled for blackmailing a chemistry professor who turned her in to the Dean.

Manuel knocked one last time in April, late at night after she had gone to bed. He wouldn't let her turn on the lights. 'No,' he said. 'I haven't told you before. I'm married. My wife is Carmen Lopez.'

In the dark she could still make out his expression, stern, the same look he wore for giving out quizzes and grades.

When she didn't reply, he asked impatiently, 'Don't you know who Carmen Lopez is?'

Swee couldn't answer.

'She's director of the Women's Health Institute in Washington, D.C. Everyone who is anyone knows her, her name was on the short list last year for a sub-Cabinet position working directly with the President of the United States.' His dark face glimmered in the room, picking up electrical ions from the air.

'I'm not black,' he had corrected her once, disapprovingly, 'I'm Puerto Rican. You should go out and learn more about America instead of hiding in a small hick college!' His chest was a smooth shiny brown, smooth warm surfaces polished to two pink-brown nipples, his face bone-sharp chocolate-sweet, and his hair crinkled like the nub of a black fleece. In bed he smelled like fudge-buttery ice-cream, melting warm under her tongue.

'I'm not seeing you again. It's too dangerous.'

She couldn't contradict him. She didn't know Carmen Lopez, the woman who was his wife. She couldn't imagine him married.

'We own a house in the Bronx, a renovated brownstone. She's fiery, like all Puerto Ricans. That's how I like women. You are different, quiet, timid. So Asian.'

She lay silently under his weight. She knew she could tumble him off the bed if she wanted to.

'She'd kill me if she found out.' He moved his smooth muscular body rhythmically, then faster.

Climbing off, he made a sad gesture with his hands. 'Please understand, you mustn't call me anymore.'

She wondered what Carmen looked like. Fat? Tall? Shorter than herself? No, a Puerto Rican woman had to be taller. Prettier? Perhaps in bed she lay on top of him.

Later she tracked down a Bronx community newspaper, *La Raza Unidas*, in the library and found a photograph of Carmen in a month-old copy. She looked like an ordinary white business woman in a skirted suit, a little overweight, her curly hair hanging below her ears.

The caption read, 'Director of Women's Health Institute, Carmen Lopez, addresses PS 42 graduating class.' The face was expressionless, nothing to be read into it.

But until Swee saw her face, grey-blank in newsprint, she could not stop thinking of her. Everyone knew her, Manuel said. He was afraid of her. She was fiery.

Instead of dwelling on Manuel's soapy-smooth dark amber skin, Swee wondered about Carmen. Was she also glowing brown black like Manuel, all honey flesh? Did she know so much about the American constitution that the President of the United States wanted to give her a job? What was a Puerto Rican, and why did Manuel see her as unlike a Puerto Rican?

She was failing the course on the American Constitution. Professor Lopez came late and left early. She sat right in front of the class, hoping he would speak to her, but he didn't take any questions. He was so nervous he stopped dancing in front of the chalkboard. She hated to see him frightened. She called his office, but hung up when he answered, remembering his plea.

One Friday afternoon she called the history department. 'Allo,' she said carefully, speaking loudly into the mouthpiece the way she thought Carmen Lopez would speak, 'I must speak to Professor Manny Lopez in the Bronx. This is an urgent call from Washington, D.C., for his wife, who is director of the Women's Health Institute. Can you give me his Bronx telephone number?'

The secretary gave her two numbers, one for his Bronx Community Organization office – he was appointed director of the BCO last month, she said – and the second for their home. She took down the home number on a scratch pad, tore off the page, then rolled it like a cigarette and put it in her coin purse, where she could fish it out whenever she wanted to make the long-distance call.

On Tuesday, before the seminar, she stood by the bayberry bushes under Manuel's office windows, which were four stories up. The snow had almost all melted by now. In four weeks classes would be over, and Manuel would vanish into the exotic Bronx. She would not be able to feel his energy, like a black sun radiating above her, shedding dates and laws and famous American names in reams of magisterial knowledge, while a mere writing tool she chased after the flow, murmuring, wait, wait, slow down, how do you spell that name? repeat the title of that legislative act, even if his eyes would not look at her, even if he was smiling now at red-haired Kathy Pelan, his research assistant, whom everyone snickered at for spending hours in his office with him. During the seminar hour, Swee opened her coin purse and rolled the cigarette-address in a kind of ecstasy. She knew Kathy Pelan was not going to get what she wanted.

The late April afternoon was full of white threads of dandelion fluff, like fish smilt clouding the watery air. Standing under his windows, her feet trembled, struck by envy of Carmen Lopez. Carmen, who held Manuel in her power, straddling the United States Constitution all the way to the White House, where the President wanted her. Swee imagined Manuel with his keeper, the unseen figure from the island. Fiery, he had said, a word reminding her of volcanoes, their fire-red magma oozing out of hidden vents, over the high lips, blood-viscous, the ground shaking and rumbling, fissures breaking, breaking in open mouths.

Carmen would not have lain quietly under him, Swee knew. She would have shaken him, scratched him like a cat with a lizard, lifted him up on her thighs, bitten his tongue till it bled.

She looked up where the window panes reflected the low 4 p.m. sun. He never opened his windows, but even if she could have scaled the brick

walls, he would never see her staring in, the glassy insets darkly glittering, too dirty to see into or out of.

A phone call was very much like the windows – opaquely separating two bodies, placing them close enough to call out to each other.

The operator asked for a dollar and eighty cents for the first three minutes. Swee's fingers tumbled the coins carelessly into the pay box.

Someone answered even before the third ring, impatient, abrupt, impolite. 'Yes, who is this?'

She thought of hanging up, but it was too much money to waste.

'Carmen Lopez?' She was whispering.

'Yes, speaking.'

Swee could see her frowning, thinking, 'It's Manuel's woman.'

'I am a woman,' she said.

'I don't take calls for the Women's Health Institute in my home,' the voice said, cutting her off. 'Call me tomorrow in my office.'

'Wait,' she wanted to cry, 'I'm not that kind of woman. I want to know who you are, why Manuel won't see me because he is afraid of you, how come you have power over him'

There was silence at the other end, someone waiting for her answer, a faint irritated breathing.

'I'm sorry,' Swee whispered, 'I won't call again.'

'No, I don't mean that.' It was a loud confident voice, the voice of a television broadcaster, an administrator, a queen, someone who could shake a man. 'This is my home number, you understand. What do you want? Who are you?'

She hung up, and pushed the return lever, but the machine kept all her coins.

Swee left Pepsodent College as soon as the final exams were over in mid-May. She did not write the paper for the American Constitution seminar, but when she received the transcripts in Malacca, Manuel had given her an A for the course anyway.

It was the straight string of A's that persuaded Mama that America had been a good choice for her. 'Yes, yes,' Mama repeated when Swee protested, 'you must return college, only this time you take Yen to America with you. What to do? the eldest must follow the second. Peik will stay here with me, and your sister, you keep.'

Sujata Bhatt in interview with Cecile Sandten

Sujata Bhatt was born in Ahmedabad, India, in 1956, and spent her early years in Pune. She has lived, studied and worked in the United States, and is a graduate of the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa. In 1992 she was the Lansdowne Visiting Writer at the University of Victoria, B.C., Canada. She currently lives in Bremen with her husband, the German writer Michael Augustin, and their daughter. Sujata Bhatt works as a freelance writer and has translated Gujarati poetry into English for the Penguin Anthology of Contemporary Indian Women Poets. She received a Cholmondeley Award in 1991. Her books of poems are *Brunizem* (1988) which received the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia) and the Alice Hunt Bartlett Award; *Monkey Shadows* (1991) which was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation; *The Stinking Rose* (1995) and *Point No Point: Selected Poems* (1997) – all published with Carcanet. A bilingual (English-German) translation of her poems, *Nothing is Black, Really Nothing*, appeared in 1998 in the series 'Salon' with Wehrhahn Verlag, Hannover.

How did you see India when you lived in America? And how do you see India today? Do you still feel homesick sometimes or do you feel a kind of nostalgia for India, and would you even like to live there again?

Well, these questions cover a long time period. I had gone to America twice. The first time, when I was five, to New Orleans. Then we returned to India when I was eight. And then I left India when I was twelve, when we went to Newhaven, Connecticut, where we stayed more permanently. I think as a child when I left India, and also as an adolescent, I missed it in a very strong way, especially when I was twelve and, say, from the age of twelve onwards, also in my twenties. I think what I missed was a certain way of life and also friends and relatives. Today I see India as my country, but a country from which I've been apart. I think I see it fairly objectively. I don't have any romantic feelings about India. Even if I think about my childhood, I know what I loved and what I didn't like about it. I'm interested in India and always have been, that's where I come from. And I always like to know the so-called 'truth', to know what has been happening historically and politically, and what is going on culturally over there. I think there are times when I wish it would be nice to go there for a while. That's again connected with people and certain places that I

would like to see again. And I would like to spend some more time in certain parts of India. But I wouldn't want to live permanently over there. And I'm sure that my husband wouldn't. He has his work and he really needs to live in Germany. And also, it would be disruptive for my daughter's education. India is my country but I feel that now I'm in the position where when I go back it's not what I had left behind. And it's not really my home anymore. I can't go back to the time of my childhood.

How would you describe your cultural identity today?

I would say that I'm like a blend of different cultures or a hybrid. In some ways I'm Indian, in other ways I've been very much influenced by growing up in America. And I would say that I'm influenced by living in Europe, in Germany. There are certain European ways of doing things that I also do, partly for practical reasons. Because one has to adjust to the country where one lives, to very mundane things, like shopping or, if you have children, school. And, also, when you have friends, you learn how they do things. There is a European style of meeting and socializing that I also feel a part of. Very broadly I would say I'm an Indian in the diaspora. But there are many of us, and everyone is different. I think I'm a mixture by the way I live. It's all so blended together. I can't separate it any more.

Do you have the feeling that people always want to make you fit into an identity? I am thinking of an anthology edited by Anna Rutherford?

I would say that, especially when it comes to writing and publicity, that one is advertised as an Indian writer or maybe an Indian in the diaspora. In Anna Rutherford's anthology I've been put in the UK chapter. I think it's because I live in Germany, and that was the closest place. And because my publisher is in Britain, in Manchester, I'm a part of the British writing scene. I'm frequently there for readings. Being published in Britain, I'm known there more than anywhere else. I do feel that people who meet me would like to put me in some category if they don't know me, or if they are trying to understand who I am. But this is even more true when it comes to anthologies and publishing. I think that I myself would prefer to be just accepted as someone who doesn't belong in any category, or who belongs in several at the same time.

In the poem 'A Different History' you write, 'later generations grow to love that strange language', that is, English. In what sense would you say that language is always an expression of cultural identities?

First of all, I would say that not everyone who is part of the later generation has that feeling, and not everyone grows to love the English language. But there are some, and a few probably, besides myself, who do. I wasn't made to feel that English was a bad language. I was actually sent to an English school in India, and I studied English. It became my language partly because it was my parents' choice that I went to this school. In another poem in *Monkey Shadows*, in 'Nanabhai Bhatt in

Prison', I describe how my grandfather loved Tennyson. And that's really true. It's very ironic but he absolutely loved Shakespeare, and he loved Tennyson. And he continued to love those aspects of English literature although he was supporting Mahatma Gandhi. And in his quiet way, but also very strong way, he was opposed to English rule in India. But that never prevented him from loving or reading Tennyson. So I think that philosophy came down to me, also through my parents. They could separate the culture and the literature from the politics. For them it was not all black and white. I was raised not to hate English. I'm sure other people have been. And I know other Indians who are ten to fifteen years older than me, they grew up feeling it's bad to write in English and they're very patriotic about their own language. Well, my father is a scientist. For many years he hoped that I would also become a scientist. English being the language of science, he thought that I should go to an English school. Another reason was that I had started school in New Orleans. When I was eight and we went back to India, I had already finished the first two grades in English, and so my parents thought that I should continue in English. And I think a third reason why I went to an English school was, at that time in Poona, where we were living, the English schools were a lot better than the Marathi or the Hindi schools that were there.

Would you say that you use an American English or a rather 'indianized' English?

As I was brought up and educated in America, I would say that I speak and write an American English. Apart from that, my parents had seen to it that I always spoke correct English.

Is there a tradition of serious creative literature in Gujarati? Or do you rather take up ideas from the Hindi or Sanskrit and other Indian traditions?

There is major creative work in Gujarati. But there is a lot more in some other Indian languages. I have been influenced by the tradition in Gujarati literature, but also in the Sanskrit and Bengali which I've read in translation. There's a very strong tradition in many South Indian languages. A.K. Ramanujan has done many excellent translations. So I found those very inspiring, especially the translations of ancient literature.

Would you say that your cultural background, rooted in Indian culture and literature, is still present in your writing?

I think so, because I feel that even on an unconscious level it's all present, even if my subject has nothing to do with India but is concerned with, say, how I look at a street in Germany. I think there is something very faint, well in those poems it wouldn't be faint, because it wouldn't be obvious. But I think there's always some unconscious element that is there. The poems which are about India are affected by what I know of the

various Indian traditions, plus the fact that I use English. I could never say that the Indian part of my cultural knowledge is absent, nor could I forget my childhood or all the Indian influences. If an Irish writer and an Indian writer were both asked to write a poem about a tree which is in Spain, for example, I'm sure the Irish writer would have something Irish in his poem about a Spanish tree, and the Indian writer would have something Indian, even when they're trying to think only about Spain and only about the tree in Spain. Something is always there in the background. If I think about myself I feel that I have different layers of background.

Is your choice for a poem based on the subject-matter, on the rhyme, metre or structure, or just on an idea and feeling, on sounds, musicality and senses? Derek Walcott says that it is a wonderful thing that these alleged literary shapes, these structures and devices, are not in fact artificial. They are part of the rhythm of natural human narration. How would you describe your poetry?

I would agree with what Walcott says. I think that my choice of a poem is sometimes the subject or the topic. I find that the rhyme, the metre – I try to avoid obvious rhymes – but, say, the structure or the form and the rhythm, and also the tone of voice and the diction in the poem all come together with the subject-matter. The poems come out sort of as a piece if the poem is going to work. But I can't write a poem where I have to first think of the form or the words. Frequently, what happens is that I might have one line in my head. And if I write it down I have more lines. In a few hours or a few days I might have a poem.

What do you think about the sentence 'all Art aspires to the condition of music'? Poetry and singing or music are very closely related to each other.

I think that sounds like something that Yeats said, and I think that's very true. I feel that the poem has to have its own life and its own rhythm. When I'm writing a poem, it has to come naturally. It's possible that in the end I have to polish up things or fine tune it. When I feel that I have a certain rhythm in my mind that's connected with the images then I feel that I'm able to write. When I have a phase in which I feel I can't write, that means I have no music in my mind, or no images that are working in a way connected with music. Or I feel that the poem has to have a certain energy to begin with. So when I'm writing, this energy has to appear.

What about myth, religion, or even dreams? Do you believe that there is no escape from a religion like Hinduism, and from cultural behaviour as an Indian-born writer, a view Nayantara Sahgal put forward in an essay?

I think dreams are important. I haven't really had any dreams that I have used in my poems lately. But sometimes dreams are very powerful. As far as religion is concerned, this goes back to the question about whether, as an Indian-born writer, one has to be involved with religion. I think that's very dogmatic. I would totally disagree. I think what Nayantara Sahgal

says is very presumptuous. Every writer, every person is free to decide whether they believe in one religion or not. I'm interested in Hinduism because that's a part of my childhood. But I should say that I'm interested in other religions as well. I'm also interested in Buddhism. An Indian writer doesn't have to be religious and doesn't have to focus on religion. My focuses are usually connected with my childhood, and with people whom I'm close to, who are perhaps religious.

Exile, Salman Rushdie expounds, is very different from immigration. 'Exile is a dream of glorious return' (The Satanic Verses). What do you think about this expression? How would you describe your own situation?

I suppose for Salman Rushdie, who isn't able to travel freely, it is a dream of glorious return because he can only fantasize about returning. I don't have to live under such conditions. There are also other writers who cannot go back to their countries. I think, for them, exile does lead to dreams of returning. In a way I'm exiled because, when I do return, what I go back to is not always what I'm looking for, it's not what I remember or what I miss, sometimes. Returning doesn't make me feel now I'm at home, that's no longer true. When I was seventeen and I would go to India during the holidays, I could still feel that I was home. But by the time I was twenty-five, I didn't feel that way any more, mainly because I couldn't be a child any more.

As a writer, do you feel lucky being able to move around in the world? Is there not a feeling of loss always lingering around you?

Yes, I do feel lucky being able to move around. I also feel lucky to be in Europe, and to have a chance to look at America from the outside. I do miss America in a way that I hadn't before. Now I know what I like about it and what I don't. I suppose when I'm over there I know what I like about Europe and what I don't. I suppose there is some feeling of loss because I know that there is no physical place where I would say: this is the only place for me, or, this is my home. I don't have that. I had to leave so many places. On the other hand, as a writer it's an advantage being an outsider. Writers have to be outsiders.

So, exile is the poet's natural condition?

Oh yes, I would agree. In order to write, a person has to remove himself into a room and have some privacy because writing is a very solitary activity. And being an outsider, just in the sense of culture, nationality and language, that can frequently help someone who is a writer or an artist.

How much does the 'white' European and German culture influence you in your writing process? Is it difficult for you to live in Germany?

I would say that German culture in terms of music and literature has influenced me. There are German writers whose work I like very much.

And the old tradition of music has influenced me, obviously Bach. And I've been very interested in Wagner's operas. I've only seen one, but I've listened to the music, which is interesting; also the very old myths going back, say, to Grimms' fairy tales which I read as a child in India and also in America, which many children all the over the world read. I do feel more of an outsider in Germany also because of the language. Sometimes I feel that there's a strong tension that I have with the German language, for example, on a day-to-day basis. When I'm writing a lot or reading – I'm usually doing one or the other – and I take a break and go to the bakery to buy some bread, it's a very surreal experience: imagine after three hours of writing in English and being almost in a trance, then quickly running out to do some shopping for food and speaking to the shopkeepers in German, and then coming back home again – that sometimes feels very strange.

Do you feel restricted as a female poet with regards to so-called 'universal' subjects that male poets write about, given that you write about women's concerns in life, like pregnancy, childbirth, children, menstruation?

No, I've never felt restricted about subjects. I always felt that I could write what I wanted to. I think part of the reason I have poems about women's experiences is that I tend to write out of my life to some extent. In many poems I've changed things or put in a lot of fiction, or I have female characters who are not me, but I imagine a woman in a different time and a different place. But in some way she would be connected to me. I would say that that's why I've written about those subjects.

In an interview in Outposts, Derek Walcott says that 'the less original you are as a young man and the more you model yourself on the great masters, that is where your originality lies.' Would you agree? In what sense would you describe how you started to write poetry?

I think I would agree because no one can write in a vacuum. The best writers are knowledgeable about all that has been written before them and alongside them. A writer who is ignorant about what has already been written is usually not a good writer, or that type of writer can't really go on very far. Sooner or later the ignorance would be evident. It would be like someone trying to pretend that they were not connected to any society, culture or history. I started writing actually when I was eight. And as I got older I took it more seriously. When I was fourteen and fifteen – at that time I was in America – I was very familiar with many 20th-century American writers. I was reading a lot on my own. I had started to read Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, and many others who came after them. By the time I was sixteen I was aware that so much had already been revolutionized in poetry: I had read Plath and Wallace Stevens, for example. If I go back to that time I was totally in love with many of these writers. I wanted to write like all of them. What happened was that I was

attracted to writers who were totally different, say, Emily Dickinson, Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost. Of course I tried to learn what I could from them. And I know that sometimes I took ideas from Wallace Stevens. Other times I was very affected by Virginia Woolf or Thomas Hardy. I think it was good there was such a variety that I was interested in at that young age. It made me realize how much had already been done. I felt it was so difficult to do anything beyond that. As a young writer one thinks that what one wishes to say has already been said by someone else. But I think it's very true that a young writer learns how to write by studying the old masters.

Would you agree with Derek Walcott that poetry has removed itself by its own choice into something that is private, that comes out in little magazines that only other poets read. Has poetry moved away into a little chamber of its own, the so-called ivory tower?

I think that is especially true in America. But it is also the case in many other countries. Very few people read poetry, and many people have terrible prejudices against poetry. I know for example that in India very few publishers are publishing poetry. Two years ago I got a letter from an international publishing house in India saying that they're discontinuing poetry from their list. They wrote to my publisher that they would only be interested in novels from me and not in my Selected Poems. I don't know why, but I think it's also because very few people enjoy reading poetry. But novels, the cheaper and the less literary the novels, the more popular they are, like these romances which are best-sellers. That's what the average person wants to read. I think there's a lot good poetry appearing in different countries. I think it's too bad that the average person does not appreciate reading poetry. This sounds very elitist but I really feel that not everyone is able to understand poetry.

The Stinking Rose was published in 1995. What does the title stand for, symbolically? And how is the new book structured in comparison to your earlier collections, Brunizem (1988) and Monkey Shadows (1991)?

I feel that each book is different from the others. Maybe I should begin with the first. The earliest poems in *Brunizem* were written when I was in my early twenties. I finished the volume when I was twenty-eight or twenty-nine, and then it took time to get published. First of all it's special because it's a first book. I have written many poems before *Brunizem* and could have published a book when I was, say, nineteen or twenty. Now I would probably never publish those poems unless I reworked them, or called them 'juvenile poems'. There is a lot of variety in *Brunizem*: half of the poems are about India, the other half are about the western world. Coming to *Monkey Shadows*: that was written from 1988 after *Brunizem* was published. New poems that were written while I was waiting for *Brunizem* to get published were included in there, too. So that's why it's

also a long book. *Monkey Shadows* consists largely of narrative. Most of the poems were written after my daughter was born. There are many and sometimes long poems about different relatives, and poems looking at my childhood in a different way, like the monkey poems. *The Stinking Rose*, again, is very different. I wanted to do something different each time. I didn't want to copy or imitate myself. I was lucky that the different ideas or different styles just started to happen by themselves. In *The Stinking Rose* I have many poems which are shorter. When I did *Brunizem* I also wanted to be able to write really short poems but I always found that difficult. In *The Stinking Rose* I was trying to get a style that was also very spare. I enjoy, at this point, writing long as well as short poems. There were also differences in my life, say, after *Brunizem* was published, I had my daughter, and then after *Monkey Shadows* was published, I went to Canada and we lived there for half a year. That in turn affected the type of poems in *The Stinking Rose*.

The rose is the European symbol of love, and when you put the word 'stinking' in front of the rose, the image becomes very ironic. Some poststructuralists would say, by doing this you 'deconstruct' the European symbol of love. Would you agree?

Well I didn't think about it like that because I was focusing more on garlic. But then garlic stands for a variety of cultures. And the rose is also an important symbol in other cultures as well. I didn't plan on writing that many garlic poems. But the more I found out about garlic the more interested I became with that.

What was it like working with Rolf Wienbeck, the painter, who did the drawings for The Stinking Rose? You seem to like to cross over to different forms of art, like painting or film (in one of your poems). Do they give you some inspiration?

With Rolf it was very interesting. First it started out that I asked him if he would do a cover for the book. He was very interested by the garlic theme as well. So he did many pictures and paintings and etchings and wood carvings; the cover is a wood carving. When he printed that, he did so in all sorts of colours. It took a while before I could decide which colour to take because he had also used this dark turmeric, or mustard yellow, and red, and he had used green and black and white and red. He had done many pencil drawings and pen and ink drawings. At that time I would frequently pass by his house after shopping. Our whole dialogue with all these other drawings was very natural as we are friends, and some of the poems developed out of our talks about garlic. I would think about the different techniques or different materials he used, whether he did a fine pencil drawing or whether he did an oil painting. That gave a different image or different meaning to the garlic for me. Frequently he would show me new things, his own experiments with the subject. That was

very enjoyable and it was a very spontaneous interaction.

Can you say something about your new projects? Once you told me that you feel a more narrative way of writing developing in you. What about writing a novel? Or would you prefer to go on writing poetry?

I would try to write a novel, or I still want to, at least, experiment with it. But at the moment poems are coming out. I am and always have been attracted to the narrative style. After *The Stinking Rose* was published I thought of a book in which I would write poems in response to a series of self-portraits by Paula Modersohn-Becker. Two poems on this theme have already appeared in my first and third books. I thought that this would be a way to give myself an assignment, so I wouldn't feel I was in limbo or without any project. I've been interested in Paula Modersohn-Becker's work since I first saw it, and I've since looked at many more of her paintings. There was a special exhibition, here in Bremen. And I hope that the book would also be a visual book, in which I could reproduce some of the paintings. A totally new collection that I'm in the middle of working on right now will be out in spring 2000. Its title is *Augatora*, a Low-German word meaning 'the eye's gate'. There won't be any Paula Modersohn-Becker poems in it as I am keeping that project separate!

Thank you very much.

AMRIT & RABINDRA KAUR SINGH

Cover Artists: 'Twin Studio'



© Photo credit: Dr Karmail Singh

'Considered amongst the freshest of the new British artists' (*Daily Telegraph*), Rabindra and Amrit are twin sisters of Indian origin. Born in London in 1966, they moved with their family to Merseyside in 1974 where they are now based. Educated in a local Catholic Convent school their initial intention was to follow a vocation in Medicine; their career in Art developed by chance when circumstances pushed them both to read for a

BA Hons. in Ecclesiastical History, Comparative Religion and Contemporary Western Art History. During this period the Twins began to develop their unique style of painting largely in rebellion against the intense pressure they experienced to conform to Western models of contemporary art. They drew inspiration from the Indian Miniature tradition which had captivated them five years earlier when they visited India for the first time. By 1987 they had established this tradition as the most pertinent means of expressing their artistic and cultural identity; since which time they have steadily built up a reputation as accomplished artists, receiving international media coverage and awards for their paintings. Described as 'both challenging and fascinating' (Dr Swallow, Victoria and Albert Museum) and as 'some of the most optimistic images of our Multi-cultural world' (*The Guardian*), the Twins' paintings can be seen in both private and public collections worldwide. In 1994 they were elected as members of the Manchester Academy of Fine Arts.

Their work has been displayed in many venues and was included in The Arts Council of Great Britain touring show, *Krishna the Divine Lover* (1997). In 1997 their personal interest in and dedication to promoting Indian art, led to their curating 'Zindabad 1997' – a major festival of South East Asian Arts celebrating 50 years of Indian independence. From late 1997 to early 1998 the Twins toured Switzerland and France with other top artists from Merseyside. In September 1998 they represented Liverpool painters in the Cologne Festival of Liverpool Arts, and continue to be invited to exhibit in Europe. They are currently involved in a UK tour from March 1999 to mid 2000 opening at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and concluding at Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art.

Featured in *Women of Substance* – a book on successful Asian women in Britain – they were nominated to be profiled in *Asians in the Millennium: the definitive Who's Who of Asians in Britain*. They were commissioned by the Sikh Foundation in California to write an illustrated book of poems as part of the 1999 international tercentenary celebrations of the founding of the Khalsa in 1699.

The Twins' empathy with each other's thought and style allows them to work as one on the same project. This can be seen in the photograph, Rabindra on the left and Amrit on the right working on a picture depicting the Storming of the Golden Temple in 1984.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

SUSAN BASSNETT is Professor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Warwick, where she teaches comparative literature and translation studies. She has published over 20 books, including translations of novels, plays and poetry from Spanish, Italian and Polish. Widely travelled she is currently writing a travel book. She has four children and a small menagerie of household animals that bring commonsense back into her life. The extract is from work in progress.

LINDSEY COLLEN South African born Mauritian novelist, is the author of *There is a Tide* (1990), *The Rape of Sita* (1993) which was awarded the 1994 Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Africa), and *Getting Rid of It* (1997). 'Honey's Mother's Confession' is an extract from *Mutiny*, a new work.

ELIZABETH COOK has published a study of late Renaissance poetry, *Seeing Through Words* (1986), and an edition of *John Keats* (1990) as well as her own poetry and short stories. Her most recent work is *Achilles*, a narrative for performance.

IAN DUHIG lives in Leeds. He worked with homeless people for fifteen years but now teaches and writes. He has won the Northern and National Poetry Competition and was chosen for the Poetry Society's New Generation Poet's Promotion. His most recent book is *Nominees* (1998).

GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE was born in Windsor, Nova Scotia in 1960. His published works include the acclaimed *Whylah Falls* (1990), a verse-novel; *Whylah Falls: The Play* (1999), a verse-drama; and *Beatrice Chancy* (1999), a verse-drama. He has also authored an opera libretto and a feature-length film screenplay. In 1998, he received the prestigious Portia White Prize. He teaches Canadian and African-American Studies at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

CLAIRE HARRIS writes from Calgary, Canada, where she now lives in retired bliss. She has published six books of poetry, among them *Fables from the Women's Quarters* which won a Commonwealth Award for poetry (American Area); *Drawing Down a Daughter*, short-listed for the Governor General Award, and most recently *dipped in shadow* shortlisted for the Writer's Guild of Alberta Award. Her work has been translated into German, Gujarati and Hindi. 'Ka'ci' is an extract from work in progress.

OSMAN JAMAL has a M.Phil. in English Literature from Leeds University. He has taught and lectured widely on the subject in Dhaka College, the University of Chittagong, and in Bradford schools. He is well-known as the translator of Shaikat Osman's fiction. His translation of *Janani* was published in the Heinemann Asian Writers Series in 1993; and his criticism has appeared in *Third Text*.

JACKIE KAY was born and brought up in Scotland. Her most recent work includes her novel, *Trumpet* (1998) which won the 1998 Guardian Fiction Prize; and a volume of poems, *Off Colour* (1998), which was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot prize.

SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM's first book of poems, *Crossing the Peninsula*, was awarded the 1980 Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Her most recent publications

include a volume of poems, *What the Fortune Teller Didn't Say* (1998), and a collection of stories, *Two Dreams* (1997). Her memoir, *Among the White Moon Faces* (1996), received the American Book Award. She is Chair of Women's Studies at the University of California.

ROSHNI MOONEERAM is a Ph.D. student in the French department at the University of Leeds researching on the emergence of Mauritian Creole as a literary language. She is the translator of *Toufann*.

KWADWO OSEI-NYAME, JNR, Ph.D. (Oxford), is a lecturer in African Literature at the School of Oriental and African Studies. His articles have appeared in *Research in African Literatures* and *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*.

CECILE SANDTEN read English and Cultural Studies at the University of Bremen and the University of Ulster, Coleraine. She received a three-year scholarship from the Heinrich Böll Foundation (Cologne, Berlin) and she was Visiting Doctoral Student at Aalborg University, Denmark. Her Ph.D. thesis, 'Broken Mirrors. Interkulturalität am Beispiel der indischen Lyrikerin Sujata Bhatt', was published with Peter Lang (1998). She is an assistant lecturer/professor in the field of New English Literatures/Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Bremen.

DAEMIENNE SHEEHAN a freelance writer she is currently working on a radio play called 'The Place' about the relationship between a hostess and an ex-war criminal set in Japan. 'My First Englishman' was runner-up in Stand Magazine Short Story competition. Other stories have been broadcast on radio.

AMRIT AND RABINDRA KAUR SINGH include among their current projects *Bindhu's Weddings* for The Sikh Foundation, California (1999), an illustrated children's poetry book which focuses on aspects of the Sikh wedding in Britain; and *Twin Perspectives* (Twin Studio, 1999), a full-colour, fine art publication of their work brought out to coincide with their UK tour, text by Julian Spalding, Deborah Swallow, and Raj Pal.

GABRIELLE WATLING researched on 'The Efficacy of Theories of Hybridity in Postcolonial Writing', and her Ph.D. was awarded by the James Cook University in 1998. She has published on post-colonial theory and cultural studies, and on the writing of V.S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon. She presently teaches on the Mexican campus of Endicott College.

JOHN WHALE was born in Liverpool in 1956. He has published poems in a variety of magazines and his work was featured in *Anvil New Poets 2*, edited by Carol Ann Duffy. He teaches at the University of Leeds.

LANDEG WHITE was born in South Wales and lives in Lisbon after working in Trinidad, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Zambia and York. The poems included here are from South, to be published this spring by CEMA Books, Portugal, and distributed in Britain by Central Books. Other works include *The View from the Stockade* (1991), and *Bounty* (1993).

KUNAPIPI

FICTION

Lindsey Collen, Elizabeth Cook, Fazlul Huq, Shirley Geok-lin Lim
Daemienne Sheehan

POETRY

Susan Bassnett & Alejandra Pizarnik, George Elliott Clarke
Ian Duhig, Claire Harris, Jackie Kay, John Whale, Landeg White

ARTICLES

Roshni Mooneeram, 'Prospero's Island Revisited: Dev Virahsawmy's
Toufann'; Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, Jr, 'The Nation as Imagined
Community: Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*'; Gabrielle
Watling, 'Hybridity as Agency for the Postcolonial Migrant: Bharati
Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days*'

INTERVIEW

Sujata Bhatt in interview with Cecile Sandten

TRANSLATION

Susan Bassnett, Osman Jamal

COVER: 'Painting the Town Red', Amrit K.D. Kaur Singh, 1996

ISBN 1-871049-63-6



9 781871 049633 >



DANGAROO

PRESS

ISSN 0106-5734



9 770106 573043

